

## EUROPEAN CHALLENGES TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

The Third Ecumenical Assembly<sup>1</sup>, to take place on 4-9 September in Sibiu<sup>2</sup>, Romania, offers a propitious opportunity to focus on the exercise of Christian responsibility for the future of Europe both on the part of the Churches and of the individual Christian qua citizen. In addressing the topic of European challenges to the Christian Churches on the island of Ireland, some preliminary remarks may be advanced by way of introduction:

- The Europe spoken of here is the post-war project of peace and solidarity between nations and peoples, based on hard-won political choices and compromises. The European Communities were its motor. This project is inspired by a social ethical vision and value system rooted in the Judaeo-Christian heritage. This project has been carried forward by the common market, become the single market, which generated deeper co-operation between the member states and duly led to closer political, economic and monetary integration in order to advance the European common good.
- As a project rooted in democracy and the rule of law, with its institutions and community method of pooling sovereignty in agreed spheres and according to agreed rules, it has consolidated peace as a condition of life on our continent. It has proven its constitutive quality of openness in the successive enlargements to new member states, especially in the historic enlargement of 1 May 2004.
- Neither at the moment of its inception, nor at any of the nodal points in the process of European integration did the Churches in Europe sacralise the European project. However their leaders and many Christian organisations have made a positive discernment of the political, cultural, and social ethical significance of this unique experiment. They have underlined the particular responsibility of Christians for its further development as a pole of value based governance at the supranational level in a world which is evermore interdependent and in urgent need of more efficient institutions and mechanisms of good governance at all levels.
- The present and future context of the European project is different to that of its birth. The Cold War has ended. But new demons haunt the psyche of many of our fellow citizens : fear of the consequences of globalisation on work and employment, fear of the stranger as immigrant, fear for the future of the social welfare systems, fear that enlarged membership of the EU reduces our national capacity to address and manage these issues, a sense of impotence in regard to the political processes. Many of these fears, often engendered and manipulated for ideological purposes, remain undefined, undifferentiated, inadequately addressed by the weavers of

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<sup>1</sup> The first European Ecumenical Assembly (EEA 1) with the theme *Peace and Justice* was held in Basel from Pentecost Monday to Trinity Sunday according to the western calendar, 15-21 May 1989. EEA 2, with *Reconciliation: Gift of God and Source of New Life* as its theme was held in Graz, Austria, 23-29 June 1997. The theme chosen by the organisers, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE), for the EEA 3 is *The Light of Christ shines upon all: Hope for renewal and unity in Europe*. The decision to continue with the EEA process reflects the sentiments expressed in the *Charta Oecumenica*, (Ch. 4.) which was signed in Strasbourg on 22 April 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The city of Sibiu, (Hermannstadt) is situated in eastern Romania and in the south of Transylvania. Its population is 155.000 and has a student population of some 25.000. Together with Luxembourg it will be the cultural capital of Europe in 2007. Statistics cited for the religious confessions are : Orthodox (91%), Reformed (3%), Greek Catholic (2%), Roman Catholic (1.5%). For further information cf. [www.sibiu.ro](http://www.sibiu.ro)

meaning in our societies. Evangelisation and pastoral care of the contemporary soul requires a narrative to address these and other fears threatening the individual and society.

- European challenges for our Churches are at once part of our local situation and of our chosen European context, a political context necessary to address numerous issues confronting our national governments. Europe is an historical and now newly qualified intrinsic dimension of our local, regional and national identities.
- The EU is bound by the treaties to respect the national identities of the member states (article 6 TEU) and to contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states while respecting their national and regional diversity (article 151 TEC). This remarkable and life-promising aspiration will continue to be a flash-point of generative tension in the future, a flash-point where the Christian voice can and must engage.
- The treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, signed on 29 October 2004 and presently ratified by 15 member states, sets out in its first part the European Union's values and objectives<sup>3</sup>. The European political and economic project was rooted in an ethical and spiritual vision from its inception. For three decades from the treaty of Rome (1957) until after the Single European Act (1986) the project appeared to focus on achieving the common market and its legal and commercial infrastructure to the neglect of the value system on which the project was founded. If that same market was a motor and vector to hone the EC into a value-based Community, it was the exercise of an elite, of a well-intentioned political, diplomatic and intellectual elite working to promote the European common good. The events of autumn 1989, the reunification of Germany, the single market project, and the emergence of the knowledge and information society would coalesce to change the game definitively along two major lines : firstly, political leaders felt the need to recover and restate the aims of the project in the new context, and secondly, the citizen, as individual and organised in civil society groups, insisted

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<sup>3</sup> The Union's values: Article 1-2 : The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

The Union's objectives : Article 1-3 :

1. The Union shall aim to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples
2. The Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, and an internal market where competition is free and undistorted
3. The Union shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. It shall promote scientific and technological advance.

It shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child

It shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States.

It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.

4. In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.
5. The Union shall pursue its objectives by appropriate means commensurate with the competences which are conferred upon it in the Constitution.

on being heard directly by the European institutions. Democracy was called to become participatory as well as being representative.

These considerations and developments constitute something of the background to the EEA 3 and they partly determine the context for the work of evangelisation in Europe. Pinpointing challenges for the Churches, specifically as European in kind, if such can be said to exist, is necessarily a selective exercise. An effort will be made therefore to limit them to a few core challenges for the Churches throughout Europe, not just on this island and to group some major challenges under more general headings.

*Promote understanding and appreciation of the European achievement*

After fifty years of singular achievement the process of European integration still does not evoke pride in the hearts of its citizens. Yet paradoxically they have gained immensely from its success. Peace has been established and consolidated between the member states. A new so-called community method, combining inter-governmentalism and sharing of sovereignty in agreed areas and according to agreed rules, is carried by the European institutions – the European Commission which initiates, the European Parliament elected by the citizens and representing them, the Council of Ministers which represents the member states, and the European Court of Justice which arbitrates in event of dispute. If this institutional system needs re-tuning in order to function in a Union of twenty five, it has proven that it can work and that it ensures a fine balance between the large and small member states. Consensus building through negotiation has replaced war. Solidarity in divining policies which promote the common European interest is the new post-war method. Membership of this community of nations is by free choice provided its basic principles set out in the treaties are accepted. They are distilled in the Copenhagen political and economic criteria.

Wealth, resources and know-how have been shared in solidarity between the Member States to develop their economies, their infrastructures and the well-being of their citizens. The internal market has brought immense benefits in terms of production, trade and job creation. Entrepreneurs, employers and workers have benefited from the free movement of goods, capital, services and persons, even if much remains to be completed in this regard to remove obstacles to freedom of movement within the EU.

The success of the internal market, of the EC regional and structural funds, deepened trust between the member states. Even if this vital quality for good and peaceful relations between peoples and nations may need to be deepened in the European civic consciousness, a bedrock of this trust enabled governments to pursue and achieve deeper political integration in the form of the single market, the twelve member states of the Euro-zone, an embryonic foreign policy and the setting in place piecemeal of key elements in a common justice and internal policy field. Each of these developments has consolidated the European project, brought benefits to the citizen. It should be expected that such a solid achievement would inspire and engender confidence in facing the challenges of the future. But this is not so. Is this due to the European's predisposition to self-doubt, or are there other causes?

For some years before the no votes in the French and Dutch referendums on the Constitutional Treaty in summer 2005, it was evident that there existed an information gap and a credibility gap between the citizen and the European institutions. If the former was the legacy of an elite driven political system and of the pre-information society, the latter resulted in no small part from a failure of national politicians to explain the community method of policy-making, and above all from their persistent, at best naive and at worst malevolent, presentation of European negotiations as competitive wrestling rather than as hard and gruelling efforts to find and promote the European and Community interest. With the rise of

organised civil society citizens' expectations have increased in regard to political institutions. They expect them to be representative of course, to fulfil the requirements of legitimacy, accountability and transparency and also to devise mechanisms for participatory democracy. Even if the EU has taken significant steps<sup>4</sup> in these domains in recent years, this also remains relatively unknown.

There is therefore a need for our fellow citizens and above all Christians to awaken to the significance of Europe's achievement since the Second World War. A European civics education programme would provide a core element in this awakening. Such a programme must include an explicit exploration of the ethical and spiritual sources of the political choices made by the founding fathers of the European Communities, the institutions and the European political method. Such civic education will be strengthened by an elucidation within the Christian community of the ethical achievement of the European project and of the EU's future potential to enable our nations to address the challenges of globalisation. The development of a narrative within our faith and ecclesial communities on the significance of the European project is a necessary contribution to awaken active, constructively critical and responsible citizenship of Europe<sup>5</sup>.

### *Participate : contribute to shaping policy and a European demos*

If the EC institutions were blind for three decades and more to the role of the religion and the Churches in the European body politic, this situation has changed. The reasons for this change are numerous. Two of them are worth recalling here. Firstly the Churches and their leaders recognised the moral quality of the European project and the consonance of its fundamental objectives with a Christian world view. Secondly, on the basis of this discernment, Churches-linked organisations were established to explore on the basis of Christian social thought issues in policy-making with European civil servants and politicians and to shape a European public opinion, a European demos, through publications and initiatives of various kinds. In due course the work of these Church organisations created an informal space for informal input from the Churches to the EC institutional milieu. This gradual evolution received a new impetus in the early 1990s at the behest of President J. Delors with the initiation of twice yearly, jointly organised dialogue seminars between the European Commission and the Churches on European policy issues. An informal practice or device without legal basis, they offered and still offer the Churches an opportunity to comment on draft policy initiatives. This practice has acquired the prospect of a constitutional guarantee and quality in article 1-52 of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe<sup>6</sup>. According to its article 1- 52.3 the EU undertakes to engage in dialogue with the Churches and religious communities. Taking account of the myopia of the EC institutions regarding religion and Churches until just over a decade ago, this article marks something of a revolution. As such it carries significant challenges for our Churches, challenges which deserve consideration in the fora<sup>7</sup> foreseen during EEA 3.

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<sup>4</sup> Some recent indications of developments in this direction are set out in : Commission of the European Communities, European Governance, A White Paper, Brussels, 25.07.2001, COM (2001) 428 final ; idem Communication on a strengthened Culture of Consultation

<sup>5</sup> Cf . The Evolution of the European Union and the Responsibility of Catholics, COMECE publication 2005. Available on [www.comece.org](http://www.comece.org)

<sup>6</sup> The text of article 1-52 reads :

1. The European Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The European Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations

<sup>7</sup> Nine fora are planned as part of the programme : (i) Unity, (ii) Spirituality, (iii) Witness, (iv) Europe, (v) Religions, (vi) Migration, (vii) Creation, (viii) Justice, (ix) Peace

In response to this provision at a general level, the Churches and their intermediate organisations can contribute to local, regional and national life by deepening believers' awareness and appreciation of the European project. They should develop their antennae for socially crucial issues at stake in EU policy-making. The perspective set out by art. 1-52.3 confronts the Churches with the challenge of preparing and training a Christian intelligentsia across the spectrum of theology, the human and natural sciences. The dialogue foreseen requires specialist input from the Churches characterised by an interdisciplinary quality combining theological insight with the required competence in the sciences directly concerned with the policy issue on the agenda for a particular policy dialogue. Training professional laity and clergy for this participation in the governance of a pluralist Europe is a central challenge for the future of the Christian evangelisation in Europe.

As a necessary ground for the credible pursuit of this dialogue on the detail of EU policy, the Churches are uniquely placed to develop among believers and citizens an appreciation of the European dimension of citizenship. This can be promoted through a variety of initiatives spanning seminars, visit and exchange programmes to parishes and Church communities in other European countries, and parish twinning programmes. The EEA 3 might also provide an opportunity to re-explore through biblical texts and the Christian heritage of spirituality the significance of encounter with the stranger as other, as different in culture, Christian confession, religion, nationality. Developing a practice and a spirituality of visit by or to the other could contribute significantly to rooting the European project in the hearts and minds of our peoples.

#### *The Churches and some current challenges in European policy*

Some of the nine fora planned for the EEA3 programme in Sibiu will focus on key policy matters presently arising on the EU agenda. In addressing these issues the Churches seek neither to usurp the responsibility of politicians and the democratic institutions nor to build up pressure for a return to Christendom. Their primary concern is rather to engender an informed European public debate and to enrich the public debate on EU policy with considerations of a religious, spiritual and social ethical nature rooted in the biblical tradition and in Christian social thought.

Whether in the immediate perspective of EEA 3 or in terms of their mission in Europe's contemporary society, among the subjects which merit attention by the Churches in terms of the current EU agenda, the following might be mentioned :

1. The debate on the future of Europe : this includes several strands, the most immediate being the future of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. By September 2007, when the EEA3 will take place, the results of the French Presidential elections will be clear and the road map to be elaborated by the German Presidency of the EU will be available. Our Heads of State and Government will have to decide how to proceed. Will it be concluded that this treaty text is dead? Or will a leader emerge with an inspired formula to show a way forward?

What kind of solutions can be envisaged for the longer term? Do we wish a more politically integrated Europe, more effective on the world stage, or merely more enlarged market? Will the EU become a family of nations linked by concentric circles, with the Euro-zone constituting the hard-core, and surrounded by a series of circles each characterised by a varying degree of integration ? Is such a construction feasible without the UK, given its capacity and role in defence policy, in the core group? Clearly, belonging to each of the circles will require acceptance of the basic principles on which the EU is constructed. It may not be for Churches to pronounce even preferential judgements on such a matter. However the European achievement

to date and our fellow citizens deserve elucidation on these crucial subjects from the Christian community.

2. Social Europe pulses with importance for the Churches and their charitable agencies. It is a vast field where competence lies with the member states. However there is need for advocacy work in regard to the Lisbon Strategy's objectives. Competitiveness cannot be achieved at the cost of social cohesion. In past decades the rising tide in the industrial and agricultural sectors permitted increased levels of social welfare and services based on work and production. Globalisation and the delocalisation of industry and production raises challenges of a new order for social policy. The European Commission is presently initiating a reflection process on "social realities". How should social policy adequate to the conditions of a globalising world be conceived and organised ? Is it conceivable that the fulcrum might be moved away from work (ever more expensive) towards a taxation based system linked to the provision of services of general interest?

The EU does not have competence for family policy. However many of its policy provisions regulating the internal market affect the conditions for family life throughout the Union. Europe faces a major demographic problem. Advocacy is needed to persuade the EU to develop a horizontal policy preference in to favour and support family life, as an investment in our future and in sense of Europe's future.

3. In the sphere of EU Innovation and Research policy the fine point of the debate on values and policy is encountered. The negotiations on the Seventh Framework Research Programme and in particular the debates on EU funding of specific research projects have manifested at a European level the challenge of conjugating politics, ethics and law-making also experienced at the member state level. How is an open debate on fundamental anthropological and ethical issues to be conducted in the face of pressure from immense industrial interests and lobbies? The negotiation of this programme has shown that the EU must develop greater transparency within and between its institutions in this field. It also shows the need for Churches and Christians to play a stronger role vis à vis their national ministries, their Members of the European Parliament. Provided advocacy is undertaken with the national ministries, through their Brussels agencies they could strengthen their advocacy towards the Council of Ministers.
4. As you know some 200 million people no longer live in their native country. International migration has increased. Ireland has become a country of immigration and is confronted with the challenge of how to integrate non-nationals and to co-operate in developing a comprehensive EU policy on migration. EU Migration and asylum policy touch an area of primary concern for the Churches – how do we treat the stranger, often poor and abject, in our midst? What is the value base for our EU migration policy ad intra and ad extra ?

The EU's Tampere Programme on Justice and Home Affairs (1999-2004) promoted a comprehensive approach to migration addressing political, human rights and development issues in countries of origin and transit. Then with the drive for security provisions, the Hague Programme (2004-2009) took a more restrictive approach. Thus, for example, the EU promoted the improvement of migration management and the fight against "illegal immigration" in third countries.

By way of indicating a set of desiderata for an EU migration and asylum policy Church agencies published *Twelve Recommendations - Towards a Balanced Approach in EU Migration and*

*Asylum Policy* in October 2004<sup>8</sup>. In the meantime they have followed and commented on a series of important initiatives :

The Policy Plan on Legal Migration (21 December 2005, COM, 669) focuses on economic migration, whilst providing an overview of European Commission initiatives for the period 2006-2009. In particular it announces legislative action for third-country nationals in employment – highly skilled workers, seasonal workers, intra-corporate transferees (ICT) and remunerated trainees. Many Church agencies working in this field considered these measures insufficient. They do not provide for low skilled workers and the approach taken is excessively dominated by economic considerations. However the plan took a major step forward in so far as it abandoned a security approach to migration.

The proposal for the *Return Directive* (1 September 2005, COM, 391) aims to establish common rules concerning return, removal, use of coercive measures, temporary custody and re-entry. It aims to introduce certain standards for the respect of human rights. This Directive is to be adopted by co-decision procedure. It is currently being debated in the European Parliament. In regard to this initiative Church offices are advocating for better humanitarian conditions such as, a preference for voluntary return, detention as a last resort and for the avoidance of detention in the case of minors.

The European Commission's Communication on *Policy Priorities in the fight against illegal immigration of third-country nationals* (19 July, COM 2006, 402) sets out nine policy priorities in this area : (i) cooperation with third countries, (ii) management of EU external borders, (iii) the fight against human trafficking, (iv) secure travel and ID documents, (v) regularisation campaigns, (vi) illegal employment, (vii) return policy, (viii) the exchange of information through existing instruments and (ix) the assessment of carriers' liability. This Communication marks a welcome commitment to recognising and protecting the fundamental rights of migrants. It could have given greater attention to the root causes of migration in the countries of origin. Church agencies have submitted comments on these and other issues to the European Commission.

At its meeting on 15-16 December 2005 the European Council adopted a *Global Approach to Migration : Priority Actions focusing on Africa and the Mediterranean*. In the aftermath of the tragic events in Ceuta and Melilla in 2005 the EU leaders identified three categories of priority action : (i) strengthening cooperation and action between member states on migration issues, (ii) working with key countries of origin in Africa, (iii) working with neighbouring countries. A Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development took place in Rabat (Morocco) on 10-11 July 2006. An EU-AU Conference on Migration and Development will be held on 22-23 November 2006 in Tripoli (Libya). The Church agencies following migration policy welcome efforts to link migration and development policies. In respect of this EU Global Approach they will advocate for the implementation of external policy instruments for the protection of the human rights of migrants and for enhanced governance of international migration.

As the Churches on the island of Ireland take direct care of immigrants, it is important that they support the work of their agencies working on European these policy matters. This is a direct expression of their pastoral care of the stranger in our midst.

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<sup>8</sup> Towards a Balanced Approach in EU Migration and Asylum Policy 12 Recommendations.

5. Protecting the environment, custody of creation, is essential for the quality of life of present and future generations. The challenge is to combine this with continuing economic growth in a way which is sustainable over the long term. European Union environment policy is based on the belief that high environmental standards stimulate innovation and business opportunities. Economic, social and environment policies are closely integrated, as in the Lisbon strategy.

Responsible custody of creation requires supranational and international policies and regulations. Side by side with and as a precondition for such policy there is an urgent need to intensify peoples' understanding of the need for a change of heart in regard to the use and management of the earth's resources and of the consequences of consumption habits and patterns on the cosmos.

Environmental action by the Community dates from 1972 with four successive Action programmes based on a vertical and sectoral approach to ecological problems. The 5<sup>th</sup> Community Action Programme on the Environment (1992-2000) initiated a more horizontal approach. The Treaty of Amsterdam enshrined the principle of sustainable development as one of the aims of the EC and enshrined a high degree of environmental protection one of its absolute priorities. In 1998 a European Commission Communication was launched on integrating the environment into EU policies. Since then the Community institutions have been obliged to take account of environmental considerations in all their other policies. In May 2001 the European Strategy for sustainable development was approved setting out long term objectives.

The current 6<sup>th</sup> Action Programme (2002-2012) focuses on climate change and global warming; the natural habitat and wildlife; environment and health issues; natural resources and managing waste. The Programme required the European Commission to prepare Thematic Strategies covering seven areas: (i) air pollution; (ii) waste prevention recycling; (iii) the marine environment; (iv) soil; (v) pesticides; (vi) resource use; (vii) urban environment<sup>9</sup>. In addition the Action Programme emphasises the importance of (i) enforcing existing environmental laws; (ii) taking the environmental impact into account in all relevant EU policies (e.g. agriculture, development, energy, fisheries, industry, the internal market, transport); (iii) involving business and consumers in identifying solutions to environmental problems; (iv) giving people the information they need to make environmental friendly choices; (v) raising awareness of the importance of using land wisely in order to preserve natural habitats and landscapes, and minimise urban pollution.

Furthermore concerns about the impact of pollution on people's health have been taken up in an Environment and Health Action Plan (2004-2010).

Shaping a European energy policy is a necessity for the future. After a long period of relative stability, secure and affordable energy supplies can no longer be taken for granted. At the same time, the imperative of tackling climate change demands new and more responsible approaches to energy use and energy production. These issues transcend the capacities of national governments and require the European dimension to devise a viable and sustainable political response. In 2007 The European Commission will present a Strategic Energy Review for Europe and a Green Paper on options for EU climate change policy.

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<sup>9</sup>Cf : [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/strategies\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/strategies_en.htm)

## *Ireland, the Churches and our European context*

Our more than thirty years of membership of the European Community has benefited this island greatly. The European contribution to the development of the economy, to Northern Ireland and to cross border development has given a major impetus to our standard and quality of life. Irish and British membership of the EC provided a context for the maturing of a new relationship between our countries and our national psyches. For both and particularly for Irish culture more direct contact with other cultural traditions is slowly contributing to a renewed and inter-relational appreciation of our own culture. Local and national identity have not been threatened, as some feared. The European experience has been a vector of their enhancement and has the vocation and indeed the capacity to continue to act as such. Churches in Ireland and across Europe, their communities and intermediate organisations, can play a crucial role in furthering this dimension of the European project.

The decades of our membership of the EC/EU have coincided with the spread of what is generally referred to as secularisation. This complex phenomenon, the effect of multiple and interlinked historical, technological, economic, social and cultural developments, cannot be attributed to the European Community nor to the European project. With or without Europe this process would have affected our Churches and ecclesial communities. Intriguingly the European Values Study (EVS) indicates that Europe is not as secularised as is often suggested. The vast majority of Europeans claim that they are both members of a Church and describe themselves as religious<sup>10</sup>. Whatever the nature of this affiliation or the tenets of their faith, the religious dimension has not been obliterated from the face of Europe. However it is also clear that imaginative and sustained efforts to renew spiritual life, Christian witness and lifestyle throughout Europe are urgently needed. Given the fall in religious practice, where, how and on what subjects do we challenge people, especially the younger generation, with the message of the Gospel? What germs of idealism in our citizens, once addressed and released by the liberating Word of God, can be fired to unleash a choice to follow Christ and support others in doing so within the Christian community?

In the Republic of Ireland, a young state, with a now successful economy, the Churches are faced with not infrequent expressions of a *laïcisme* (as distinct from *laïcité*) which would remove religion from the public sphere. This experience, particularly acute because of the rapidity with which Irish society was whipped from a predominantly agricultural and rural society into high-tech information society, is however neither new nor unique when seen in the European context. Similar currents are found in other countries within Europe and beyond its borders. The Churches in Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, hold to the principle of the separation of Church and State. Yet the State, and indeed Europe, in their pursuit of good governance and its prerequisite conditions presuppose a social capital of values and idealism which they cannot generate alone. Through its living tradition and transmission of faith the Christian community makes an irreplaceable contribution to the generation and renewal of this capital. The sources of this vital capital, its complexity, the contribution of Churches and religions to its sustenance, are matters of determinative importance for public debate in the Ireland of today. In the light of the profound cultural changes which mark our island north and south, this subject deserves renewed exploration on the part political scientists, practitioners and commentators. That we and our fellow citizens should experience this debate in the wider European context - whether as student, politician, civil servant, journalist or in whatever capacity - will enrich the debate on our island.

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<sup>10</sup> L. Halman, R. Lujckx and M. van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values*, Brill, Tilburg University, 2005, p.72

## *Europe an ecumenical challenge*

From the perspective of the Churches' work with the EU institutions, there is abundant evidence of the possibility of ecumenical cooperation on numerous policy issues. More than a decade of experience of the Church-EU interface testifies to significant growth of good relations and focused cooperation by the Churches. It is undeniable that the European focus, the basic Christian concern to shape Europe as a value based project, has provided a context for ecumenical exchange, growth and witness. Indeed the ecumenical imperative that Europe represents for the Christian Churches is underlined in texts such as, the Charta Oecumenica and the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Europa*.

Evidently it is possible to outline the development of such ecumenical cooperation on the part of Church-linked organisations liaising with the EU institutions, to evaluate the sources of impetus, to identify issues where ecumenical co-operation was a *sine qua non* of credible and effective advocacy. The intensity and trust characterising the ecumenical cooperation of these offices in respect of the Convention on the Future of Europe which elaborated the draft for the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was remarkable. Many submissions were prepared ecumenically. The work of following and drafting reports for the Churches on the debates in plenary was shared. Regular ecumenical briefing sessions were organised. Above all the drafts for what has become article 1-52 were proposed and monitored ecumenically at all stages. In time this will be recognised as both an ecumenical and a constitutional achievement for the common good of all Europeans.

The forthcoming enlargement of the EU to Romania and Bulgaria will increase the Orthodox population of the Union and extend its frontiers to include peoples and cultures of the Eastern Christian tradition. This imminent enlargement will enhance and diversify further the EU's peoples and nations. Among the challenges it will entail, that of advancing understanding and appreciation between the Western and Eastern traditions of Christianity is an ecumenical and cultural imperative for our Churches in Ireland and throughout Europe. The arrival of Orthodox Christians in greater numbers on our island renders this challenge more immediate and necessary for the Catholic, Anglican and Reformed traditions in Ireland. Exploring our respective theological viewpoints on some of the public policy issues facing contemporary European society may require forbearance and dexterous research. Certainly it will deepen ecumenical respect and in time enrich the mosaic of the Christian heritage in Europe.

## *CONCLUDING REMARKS*

At fifty the European project, despite its shortcomings, is an achievement of which citizens can and should be proud. Our island, our local communities have benefited from membership of the EC/EU. We are part of this European achievement. We bear responsibility for its future shape and quality as a political and societal project.

As often in the course of its five decades it has hit an air pocket. Some speak of a crisis, others of lack of political courage and vision on the part of our leaders, indeed a flight on their part from the community method toward the inter-governmental. In EU policy areas major issues will require decision in the years ahead.

Will the EU promote human dignity, protect and respect human life, the family as a basic unit of society, social justice within and beyond its borders, human rights? Much will depend on public opinion, civil society and the body politic. The Churches' vocation is to act as a leaven in local, national, European and international society.

Of their own free choice the Churches have established instruments and agencies to contribute to the shaping of Europe. It is time to make them better known at local level and for closer interaction between them and local Churches.

They are at once instruments of political diakonia at the European level and cells of Christian witness in the milieu of our EU institutions.

Our theological schools and faculties have a key role in educating future theologians to the European achievement and to that exchange between faith and reason which is a prerequisite for Christian advocacy vis à vis political institutions.

When in St. Paul's dream (Acts. 9-10) the Macedonian invited Paul to "come across to Macedonia and help us", Paul's ensuing decision to accept was rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and in courageous conviction. Today our mission in Europe requires the same faith-rooted courage and conviction.

The new Europe retains something of the quality of a dream. It is worth working untiringly to ensure that it breathes with values which we do not claim to monopolise and which we espouse and try to live by inspired by faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Annex: Religion in the EU Constitutional Treaty (CIG 87/2/04 REV 2 of 29/10/2004)**

### **PART I**

**PREAMBLE**, first paragraph:

DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law,

**ARTICLE I-52: Status of churches and non-confessional organisations**

1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.

### **PART II**

**PREAMBLE** of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, second paragraph:

Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice.

**ARTICLE II-70: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion**

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. The right to conscientious objection is recognised, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

**ARTICLE II-74: Right to education**

1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.
2. This right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education.
3. The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right.

**ARTICLE II-81: Non-discrimination**

1. Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

**ARTICLE II-82: Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity**

The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.