



European Forum for the Civil Society on 24 April 2006

Statement of the COMECE Secretariat

“A framework for a just society in Europe”

After the failure of the referenda in France and the Netherlands on the EU Constitutional Treaty the European Council in June 2005 necessitated a period of reflection on the future of Europe. With the publication of “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate” in October 2005, the European Commission wished to promote this debate, particularly in the Member States but also in the EU institutions. In January 2006 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the period of reflection. The Austrian Council Presidency will present a report on the reflection period during the European Council in June 2006.

We are pleased to participate in the European Forum for the Civil Society which has been organised by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament. We welcome the efforts undertaken by the EU institutions to reflect on the future of Europe and in particular the positive elements of the resolution of the European Parliament on the period of reflection. Given the notable indifference among many citizens and politicians in the European Union, we should like to encourage them to approach Europe's problems with new energy and to create a sustainable political and legal framework for the European Union.

- The human being with its inviolable dignity must be at the centre of the debate on the future of Europe. European integration should never be an end in itself but must orientate itself towards the hopes and fears of the people, serve the European common good and assume the responsibility of Europe towards the world.
- The debate on the future of Europe should concern the heritage, the values and the objective of the European Union in order to foster the citizens' sense of belonging. Whilst including other beliefs, the Christian faith and the ethical convictions of a great number of citizens in Europe should be more strongly taken into account.
- Communication campaigns of a limited duration are not sufficient to gain the trust of the citizens. It is advisable to concentrate on the construction of better democratic structures in order to realise the respect of subsidiarity and a stronger participation of the citizens but also of actors in civil society and the Church. Through its multiple forms of service to society and individuals, the Church shares the hopes and fears of citizens. The Church can introduce these important experiences into the political process of the European Union. Therefore her identity and her specific contribution to the common good in Europe and the whole world deserve better consideration.
- In order to promote the economic and social development of the European Union, the EU Institutions together with the Member States should introduce the necessary reforms. The Lisbon Strategy for more employment and growth offers the recognised framework for this purpose. The EU Institutions and the Member States are called to develop the European social model in order to help in its various national shapes the poor and the vulnerable as well as families. Instead of purely national approaches, a European framework should be created that is capable of managing the risks of globalisation and of harnessing new opportunities for all people.
- Europe bears a great responsibility for global peace and development. In view of the tasks in foreign, security and development policy that arise from this, the European Union must learn how to talk with one voice and act jointly. The current political and legal framework has to be further developed in this respect.

The current basic treaties of the European Union present a diffuse picture: different treaties regulate the legislative competences and the institutional structure of the European Union. The present institutional structures are not transparent or efficient enough. The current treaties maintain the pillar structure and do not provide for a consistent legal personality. The EU still lacks a legally binding treaty for the protection of human dignity and human rights. In view of the major challenges which the European Union has to face the European Union should reform its current legal basis and create a unified political and legal framework. We still hold that the Constitutional Treaty could introduce the necessary reforms. Therefore the discussion on the future of Europe should concentrate on the improvement of the Draft Constitutional Treaty in order to respect the decision of 14 Member States to ratify the Constitutional Treaty, to explore the concerns expressed by the people in France and the Netherlands and to set up a unified political and legal framework for the European Union.

In his encyclical letter *Deus caritas est* Pope Benedict XVI asserted: “*A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.*”¹ Reflection on the future of Europe must answer the question: how can the European Union best realise a society that meets the hopes and dispels the fears of the European people and lives up to its responsibility to the world? The Church is ready to provide its specific contribution to a just society in Europe. However the citizens and in particular the politicians are responsible for its construction. We encourage all citizens and politicians to assume this responsibility and to promote with new strength the construction of a just society in Europe.

Brussels, 18 April 2006

¹Encyclical letter *Deus caritas est* of Pope Benedict XVI, No. 28 a.