



Declaration by the COMECE Bishops European Elections 2014

From 22 to 25 May 2014 we shall be invited to elect the MEPs who will sit in the European Parliament. The result of these elections will decide the nature of the EU legislature for the next five years and it will have major consequences for those who govern the EU.

It is essential that citizens of the EU should take part in the democratic process by voting on election day. So good participation in the election will strengthen the new legislature.

These coming elections provide a possibility for the whole of European society to debate primary socio-economic questions which will make their mark on the European Union in years to come.

As Bishops of the COMECE, we consider that it is our duty to provide guidelines for electors so that they can determine their conscientious position. To do this, we would like to draw their attention to important issues by considering them in the light of the social teaching of the Church.

Although, in the first instance, we are looking at Catholic citizens, we hope that our advice or opinions will also be favorably received by men and women of goodwill, who are concerned about the success of the European project. We hope that our voice will also be heard by the candidates for election to the European Parliament.

To begin, we would like to draw attention to certain general considerations.

1. To vote is a right and a duty for every citizen in the EU. Several million young citizens will be voting for the first time. Among them, some are still receiving education, others are already in the labour market, and many, alas, are without employment. We encourage our young to make their voice heard by taking part in the political debate and, above all, by voting.
2. It is important that candidates and members who present themselves for a term in the European Parliament should be aware of the collateral damage caused by the economic and banking crisis that began in 2008. Pope Francis draw the attention of public opinion to the distress of people who are already poor and in a precarious position - the young and the disabled - without forgetting those who have fallen into poverty because of the current crisis. The number of "new poor" is growing alarmingly.
3. The Christian message is a message of hope. We believe that the European project is inspired by a noble vision for humanity. Each citizen, and community and, indeed, each nation state should be capable of setting aside its particular interests so as to strive for the common good. The apostolic exhortation *Eccelesia in Europa* published by Pope Jean Paul II in 2003, was a message of hope and it is with the same well founded faith in a better future that the church approaches current European challenges.
4. Temperance is a natural virtue at the heart of Christian spirituality. A culture of restraint should guide the social market economy and policies about the environment. We must learn to live with less, while for the same reason we should be vigilant so that people who live in real poverty can receive better provision.



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We should also like to draw the attention of our fellow citizens to certain specific aspect of EU policies :

1. We need to be careful that increasingly frequent initiatives aimed at unity within the European Union do not forsake the principle of subsidiarity which is a pillar for this family of nation states represented by the EU and unique in the world, nor should they compromise well established traditions which already exist in member states.
2. Another pillar of the European Union, which is also a principle in the Church's social doctrines, is that of solidarity. This principle should guide policies developed at all level in the EU, between nations, regions and population groups. We must construct a new world, which should be centered on solidarity.
3. It is of fundamental importance that we should remind ourselves that, at the base of all social and economic policy, there is a vision of humanity rooted in profound respect for human dignity. Human life should be protected from conception to natural death. The family, which is fundamental to the composition of society, should receive the same protection.
4. Europe is a continent of movement and migration - whether internal or coming from outside Europe - which has an effect on the life people and society. The EU has a common external frontier. Responsibility for receiving and integrating migrants and asylum seekers should be shared proportionately among member states. It is absolutely essential to treat migrants humanely when they arrive, that their human rights should be scrupulously respected, and that, as a consequence, all, including the churches, should endeavour to guarantee successful integration in the territory of the Union.
5. We are responsible for creation and we must increase our determination to respect and realise objectives in respect of CO2 emission, to promote a global view on climate change, to adopt a more ecological approach and we must ensure that sustainability becomes a fundamental element in all growth and development policy.
6. Religious liberty is a fundamental element of a tolerant and open society. This liberty includes freedom to demonstrate one's faith in public. We rejoice in the adoption by the Union of guidelines on the promotion and protection of liberty of religion and conviction and we hope that the European Parliament that emerges from the election will further its efforts in that respect.
7. We support all measures to protect a common weekly day of rest, which is Sunday.
8. In the next five years, demographic change will have an even more profound effect on the EU. We make a plea for our elderly fellow citizens, for access to the standard and quality of care to which they have a right, as well as for the development of policies which offer new opportunities to the young generation.

The European Union is at a turning point. The economic crisis resulting from the failure of banks in 2008 and the weight of public debt has created difficulty in relations between member state. It has made things very difficult for the founding principle of solidarity in the European Union. In its wake it has also entailed a wave of poverty which has struck a good number of our fellow citizens and broken the hearts of many young people.

We, the Catholic Bishops make a plea that the European project should neither be endangered nor abandoned by the burden of current constraints. It is essential that all of us, politicians, candidates, those involved, should contribute to constructive development of the future of Europe. We have too much to lose if the European project comes unstuck.

Finally it is essential that all of us, who are European citizens, should vote on 22-25 May. We, the Bishops, encourage you to vote following your conscience and your informed opinion.

The Bishops of the COMECE 20 March 2014