

Let us rediscover the meaning of the European Project

Declaration of the Group "Christian Initiatives for Europe" (IXE)

Shortly after the expansion of the European Union in 2004 which should have brought hope, Europe is now confronted with doubt and fear. The difficulties of the international context, an aging population, and the rise of individualism and national selfishnesses weaken European construction.

On this occasion, when we are preparing to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community on March 25, 2007, we affirm that European construction remains founded on a broader project which creates meaning and which is always of the same topic: reconciliation between people to build a space of peace, justice, prosperity and solidarity, a space open and in the service of the world.

The European Union today must face new challenges: an economic globalization that is accelerating; poverty that persists or worsens, particularly at its doors, in Africa; massive immigration; conflicts with the Near and Middle East, and serious threats to the world environment. In this context, silence or too timid action by Europe would be wrong. It is thus urgent to engage a new reflexion on the direction of the European project, to identify the behaviours that are necessary for us to change, and to prepare to assume responsibility in accordance with our history and our potential.

1. A heritage without a project?

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, what do we note? European dynamism is blocked. The adoption of the euro was a success, but the historical reunification that the European Union accomplished with the accession of twelve new member states has not been accompanied by the institutional reforms necessary for its correct operation, reforms that have, however, been in process for 15 years.

Why does this situation exist? In certain countries the European project has less support and adherence from citizens. Their disenchantment with regard to Europe was expressed almost everywhere in the weak participation in the last European elections and constitutes the major cause of the rejection of the constitutional draft treaty by two of the founder states - France and the Netherlands.

We, Christians in Europe, consider that this space of peace, prosperity and solidarity that the establishment of the European Economic Community aimed at in 1957 is at this point widely accomplished, but the goal of the project for a true political Union is suffering. Only such a Union will enable us to take up the new challenges with which we are confronted. Many fear that it is reduced to a simple authoritative regulation of the markets. Indeed, the governments of the Member States behave for the moment like stockholders, living on this extraordinary heritage, but slow in mapping new prospects for Europe.

The people, however, are searching for the direction to live together. Fifty years ago, the World Wars and the threats of totalitarianism provided the requirement for the reconciliation and unification of the continent. Today, Europeans are becoming richer, but they seem less interdependent. Individualism saps their social bond. Regarding these new challenges at the beginning of the 21st century, only common values and a project for the advancement of civilization will be able to allow them to look further into their communal destiny and to face their world responsibilities.

2. Challenges of an interdependent and durable growth

In fact, it is a question for the European States of keeping control of their destiny and of contributing their share to solving the problems of this time, in the concert of nations. When the European demographic perspectives in the next 20/30 years are without question regressing, the rise of new world powers is taking place at a vertiginous speed. A formidable redistribution of the cards is taking place in which the average powers are likely to lose a say. The consolidation and the deepening of a Union of more than 480 million inhabitants will ensure us a role as one of the largest world actors, and will allow us to serenely face globalization by making a chance for all, and in particular for the most underprivileged.

But that also supposes that we have the will, imagination and courage to propose a model of a more human civilization, and to promote rules which put the economy at the service of humanity. The values in which we believe - respect of the person, freedom, solidarity, democracy, justice - push us to place humanity at the heart of the European economic and political project. In order to guarantee human development our societies must seek a strong and bearable economic growth, based on knowledge and innovation, in respect of our fragile environment and our limited natural resources.

Economic growth is necessary to guarantee a level of high employment and social protection in Europe. It requires today, as fast as possible, concrete projections, in particular in the installation of a truly European space of research and innovation, stimulating the universities as well as industry, and the adoption of a common energy policy to guarantee our provisioning at the best price.

To face this last problem, which is global, Europe speaking with one voice would be a major partner. It must be made able to manage the reserves likely to deaden shocks on the market.

It must intensify prospective research and investments in refining and promote alternative energies. It will thus contribute to building a bearable energy future for the planet.

Too many citizens remain excluded from the advantages of economic growth. We must clearly reorient our individualistic way of life, dominated by consumption. In the heart of our heritage is engagement to guarantee human dignity and the struggle against any form of exclusion. However, under the pressure of international competition, technological developments, and with the generalization of the model of the consumer society, Europe is threatened today by a division between those who live in wellbeing and safety and those, in growing numbers, who are threatened by material poverty and who have no chance to be integrated socially. The requirement of social justice thus invites the Member States to accompany liberalization of the market with a progressive reinforcement of social norms, to assume eventual reforms of acquired advantages and to eliminate "social dumping". Solidarity being a founding value of the European Union, a constitutional treaty should thus include provisions which would better enlighten the social dimension, values and norms which, in the diversity of the traditions of the various countries, constitute the common heritage. Europe must preserve its social vocation, the essential part of its identity, and guarantee thus to each person, of any social origin, the access to training, work and a decent life.

In concern for the generations to come, we invite European leaders to support economic growth on renewable resources and to follow budget policies turned towards the preparation for the future and to reduce the debt that compromises it.

3. With world responsibility

The phenomenon of the globalisation of economic exchanges, the persistence of conflicts in the world after the Cold War, migrations, poverty and planetary epidemics represent new challenges for the European Union. They call Europe, rich in its Christian heritage, to its global responsibility for peace, solidarity and world governance in the service of man. Europe must assume its responsibility in the world. It must for that return to the essentials, that is, its spiritual foundations.

Europe, by its recent history of conflicts now overcome, and by steps towards fruitful reconciliations, has invented a new way in the history of humanity. It is a source of hope. This example of unity in diversity is a model which can help the world to progress towards unity through a globalisation more respectful of people.

Europe must also be a model for bringing together human beings of different cultures and different religions. In a globalized world, European societies are more and more invited to open to other cultures and other religions. The European Union must embrace these new realities, for example by supporting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, and by being aware that this dialogue is useful not only to ensure life together in peace, but also to enrich the European project itself.

All this implies that Europe assumes three fundamental tasks:

It must be **a factor of peace**, and for this reason develop its diplomatic and military means from the only possible point of view for it: beyond the normal functions of defence, **a world role of prevention and resolution of conflicts**, maintenance of peace and defence of human rights everywhere they are threatened,

in particular by fundamentalisms and terrorism. Taking into account the urgency, we invite European leaders to build not on an illusory unanimity, but on consensus, a European diplomacy based on a military defence that makes it credible.

It must be **an international promoter of solidarity and partnership for development**: Europe must give paramount concern to the promises made to the poorest countries. It must be exemplary in the struggle to reach the goals of the millennium by concentrating its efforts on the reduction of poverty, i.e. to achieve and exceed as soon as possible the old objectives of 0,7 % of the GDP devoted to development.

It must **create a common policy of immigration** based on a radically new approach to the problem of migration, by more narrowly coordinating more human policies of reception and integration of immigrants with much more vigorous policies of co-development in the countries of emigration which are the partners of Europe, especially within the framework of the partnerships with Africa and Latin America.

In addition to these tasks is one that constitutes a true challenge for united Europe: to imagine, propose and support the installation of **a world governance** in the service of sustainable development. In full respect to the principle of subsidiarity the problems of world dimension cannot in this way be effectively pushed aside. In the midst of the turbulence of globalization, the European example offers a model, in its constitutional and monetarist assets, or the application of the communitarian method. European citizens must understand that the pace of the world is accelerating and that it is becoming urgent for Europe to take its place there so that it assumes the responsibilities that correspond to the vocation of our continent.

4. A unity to be deepened

We are convinced that Europe must look further into its unity and find its coherence. This is why, while recognizing that applicant country's prospects for joining the EU are the most powerful motives for reform and reconciliation of the European people, we think that the wellbeing of the current members and their partners requires a pause in expansion so that the Union can concentrate on its institutional reforms, which does not exclude the reinforcement of co-operation with our neighbour countries. By perpetually carrying these forward, its existence is threatened. By the slowness of their adaptation to the new realities of the world, it is the weight of Europe on the international scene which is at risk. A reformulation of the political and cultural objectives of Europe has become urgent and indispensable.

In addition to the institutional adaptations, we expect heads of state and government to define a true ethics of European governance:

- preparing public opinion for living within a new institutional framework and adapting to a reunified Europe;
- renewing the dynamic coexistence between European institutions and national governments to avoid the rebirth of sovereignty;
- relearning subsidiarity, which presupposes the responsibility of the actors, in particular at the levels of regional, local, and civil society.


The European Union cannot be built without citizens. It is thus essential to widen spaces of European citizenship, by supporting new forms of civic participation, by stimulating the mobility of young people through school and university exchanges and by organizing a European-wide civic service.

Moreover, European democracy, which remains to be built, must rest on effective institutions and strong civic participation. However, the lack of information, even misinformation, on the operation and competencies of the European Union is dramatic. It is urgent to provide to the citizens of Europe the means of understanding and of acting within a European democracy. The transformation of consciousness with regards to Europe supposes a rehabilitation of politics and a mobilization of all the potential actors for a positive, clear, persevering and comprehensive communication, enabling Europe to come closer to the people and to allow each to better understand their own European identity. We think that this change of mentalities does not depend only on our political leaders. At their level, the actors of civil society must also take initiative: they can exert now a decisive influence.


This is why we call upon:

- Men and women political leaders to integrate a European dimension into the heart of their strategies and in their speeches;
- the media to present Europe, to make the various countries, the various cultures better known; to make better known the nature and the work of European institutions;
- teachers to integrate a European dimension into their lessons, without awaiting a reform of their teaching curriculum;
- various actors of cultural life to multiply trans-border or trans-national exchanges.
- all persons in charge of civil society to include their actions and their achievements into a European point of view.

Representatives of various movements and European organizations of Christian inspiration, we make this appeal for a new awakening of all the citizens of the European Union. The vision of the founding fathers of Europe is not a matter of the past. It is a plan for the future that our continent awaits; it is a bringer of hope for the world at the beginning of the 21st century. It is a heritage now threatened. We must return its life to it, and transmit it to Europeans and to the world. We wish to work for this with everyone who shares this objective.



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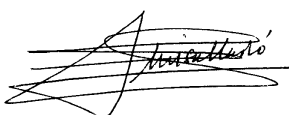
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What is the Group IXE?

During the Nineties, the Semaines Sociales de France recognised that from now on the problems of society should be studied and solved only by locating them in the international context and, initially, in the European context. The exchanges made at the end of 1999 between the Social Weeks of France and the Central Committee of German Catholics, ZdK, showed that the two organizations shared the same concerns. Thus in May 2000 their two presidents signed the Manifesto for a European Conscience, which was the starting point of an original process.

This process allowed the progressive establishment of a network of "social Christians" from the west, center and east of Europe, an informal network whose prime objective is to make it possible for its members "to know each other better and to understand each other better" in spite of the diversity of their experience, their histories and their cultures.

The second aim of this network is to establish a place of critical observation of the evolution of the European structure, a place of reflexion in reference to the principles of the social thought of the Church in order to be able, whenever possible, to be expressed and to make proposals.

Finally, this network should mobilize itself "to contribute to the success of great demonstrations of a European dimension". This was the case in September 2004 for the session of the centennial anniversary of the Social Weeks of France where the network ensured the presence of 1000 participants coming from European countries. This was also the case for Katholikentag of Saarbrücken in May 2006, within the framework of the sector of themes devoted to the place of justice in the new Europe. This is currently the case through a partnership with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) for the preparation of a Congress commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, in Rome in March 2007.

Since June 2002, this network has been animated by a Working Group, made up of representatives of twelve European countries and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE). This Group is in close contact with the persons in charge of the Social Weeks of Spain and Italy.

At a meeting in Luxembourg in March 2006, the group took the name "Initiatives of Christians for Europe", with the acronym IXE.