

**INITIATIVE OF CHRISTIANS  
FOR EUROPE  
(IXE)**

**Call to the citizens of Europe  
on the occasion of European elections  
in June 2009**

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**Overcoming the crisis and meeting the challenges of  
our time through a more united, a more  
concerted, and a more outward-looking Europe**

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# INITIATIVE OF CHRISTIANS FOR EUROPE (IXE)

Call to the citizens of Europe  
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**Overcoming the crisis and meeting the challenges of  
our time through a more united, a more  
concerted, and a more outward-looking Europe**

At a time in which the citizens of Europe are called upon to send new members to the European Parliament, we are all aware that we are experiencing a particularly difficult time in our history. Yet this is also a decisive time for our own future, and for that of our children.

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*The undersigned, originating from countries of the European Union and from candidate member states, now call upon the citizens of Europe: the Gospel and the traditions based upon it urge us to decipher these signs of the times, signs that invite us to change our lives to pave the way for a society that is more humane, more respectful of the well-being of all. Only a united Europe can respond to the current challenges by expressing its innermost values of solidarity, justice and peace throughout the world. Let us awaken to our personal responsibility for building the edifice of Europe.*

After a long period of uncertainty, Europeans are now longing to gather together. At the same time, Europe is feeling the full impact of a financial and economic crisis that is just as much an ethical and spiritual crisis. The only way to regain the confidence that has been lost is by taking a broad new initiative, one in which Europe has a key role to play, even though its

institutions have been weakened by the vagaries still weighing upon the process of ratifying the Treaty of Lisbon.

The global crisis confronts us all with a difficult test; this test is all the more trying for the world's most helpless people and nations. Yet at the same time, this test offers a unique opportunity to reorient our economies and to alter our behaviour. It also gives Europe a chance to emerge with new strength – provided that we guard our capacity to withstand adversity, and that we remain true to the values that, from the beginning, have formed the humus of this edifice unique to the entire human race.

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***Let us enact the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon as soon as possible***

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First of all, if Europe is to play its full role on the international stage within the framework of this economic crisis, equipping itself with strong and democratic institutions, we call upon our governments and the citizens of Europe to support the enactment of the Treaty signed in Lisbon by the heads of state and of government. The Treaty confers genuine powers to act and a more solid foundation from which to wage a common search for suitable solutions. In this connection, we welcome the fact that Ireland has agreed to reconsider its negative vote.

Admittedly, this Treaty is complex in its wording and not always accessible to the uninitiated reader, as is any text emerging from deliberations among 27 countries. Nevertheless, in a manner that is unprecedented, it also takes unambiguous positions with respect to fundamental European values while vesting the European Union with processes that enable more effective decision-making within the context of an enlarged Union. This same treaty is also instrumental to the power of the European Union to constitute a refuge of stability, solidarity and openness towards the East and towards the South.

While the treaty fails to mention the Christian roots of Europe, we look with favour upon the statements of this treaty that are, in fact, inspired by Christian thinking and values. Thus, for the first time the treaty explicitly

identifies human dignity as the foremost of European values, ahead of liberty, democracy and equality. It declares that the objectives of the Union include peace, full employment, sustainable development, free and fair trade, the elimination of poverty, protection of human rights, and respect for and development of international law. The idea of solidarity – a term hitherto rarely invoked in Community law – is of central importance to the Treaty of Lisbon.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is an integral part of the treaty, merges the classic fundamental rights with social rights. In this way, it guarantees access to social security, to social assistance and to housing, among other things. It also guarantees protection of the family, and protection of the rights of children, senior citizens and people with handicaps. It guarantees the right to asylum and protects principles of bioethics – such as the prohibition on reproductive cloning, eugenic practices, the use of the human body for commercial purposes, etc.

The treaty protects the status of European Churches as established under the national laws of the respective Member States, recognises the identity and contribution specific to each, and calls upon the Union to maintain an open and regular dialogue with them.

Finally, the treaty provides, among other things, for a strengthening of the powers of the European Parliament and of the national parliaments, greater transparency, more direct participation of the part of the citizenry, greater clarity in the division of responsibilities, and improved control of subsidiarity.

Because it strengthens the effectiveness and democratic legitimacy of the European Union, the treaty gives Europe the power to rise to what appear to us three major challenges of the current era: **globalisation, climate change and demographic transformation.**

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***To cope with the globalisation of the economy, let us build a Europe in a spirit of greater solidarity***

The globalisation of trade and financial relationships has spread at break-neck speed during the past two decades. But not all have reaped the fruits of growth – far from it. Indeed, today each one of us can observe the breakdown of a system dominated by an unrestrained multiplication of financial instruments, and characterised by a lack of regulation, transparency and responsibility on the part of the protagonists. At the same time, we are witnessing a rebirth of the temptation towards protectionist policies, and even within the heart of the European Union, reflexes of the ‘every man for himself’ variety.

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To prevent imbalances such as these, we are urgently called upon to place the economy at the service of people – all people. This means holding human work in high esteem, promoting the entrepreneurial spirit, and a return to a role for the state as guardian of the public interest. The European model of a social market economy must be updated in light of new realities. Its mission of reconciling economic efficiency with social justice, equality of opportunity for all, and solidarity, must be reinforced. This solidarity cannot halt at the borders between countries; instead, Europe must enlist the irreplaceable experience it has gathered over the course of many years and set about protecting, more courageously, the interests of the most vulnerable among us.

Based on this fact, and taking into account its very powerful role, the mission of the European Union is to promote a policy of global regulation, supported by international governing structures and reinforced through instruments of control. Among these, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation and the system of the United Nations must play a key role while acknowledging a proper role in decision-making for the emerging economies in the poorest countries of the world, particularly those of the African continent.

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***To cope with climate change, let us build a Europe more respectful of future generations***

A major climate change is underway; its consequences for future generations are obvious, and human responsibility for the change has been established. As Christians, we believe that Creation was entrusted to us by God, and that we are the 'custodians' charged with using it responsibly. The industrialised nations, and others in their wake, continue to rely upon production methods a lifestyle that lead to unbridled exploitation of available resources. As we well know, the results of climate change, such as storms, floods, or droughts, affect the poorest countries most of all while fanning the flames of conflict over access to water and food.

Henceforth, it is an inescapable fact that the only way to overcome climate change is through a reorientation of economic growth to reduce the consumption of energy, and of non-renewable natural resources in general. Only a united Europe is in a position to commit itself to the courageous initiatives that are now indispensable, in spite of the current financial and economic crisis. While we welcome the decisions already taken in this regard, government action, in our view, must go further than this.

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Each one of us must make his or her own personal contribution to this effort, acknowledging that another lifestyle is inevitable, particularly in the industrialised countries. Recapturing a certain restraint in the consumption of goods and in our travel habits is, first and foremost, a way to avoid ecological upheaval; but it also offers us an opportunity to turn back from a life that is too materialistic, and to open ourselves more to the wealth of interpersonal relationships.

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***To confront the demographic challenge, let us build a more generous Europe***

The third major challenge confronting most of the countries of Europe is the demographic challenge presented by the simultaneous aging and decline in our populations. In an international comparison, today Europe

is the continent most affected by this trend. The socioeconomic effects of these demographic changes include strain on our social systems, a medium-term shortage of labour, increasing dependency and social isolation of the elderly, and an increase in the potential for inter-generational conflicts.

While the underlying causes of this situation are varied, the responses to this challenge rest, first and foremost, on increased attention to the well-being of our families, the nerve centres of our societies, and on that of the young generations. The Member States, in the same way as the European Union within the framework of its own responsibilities, must take steps to foster and protect family life, permitting the family to flourish. What is needed is an effort to create the conditions that will enable parents to fulfil their desire to have children, and to harmonise family and career.

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Reaching this objective calls for mobilisation of the entire gamut of policies: health, education, employment; it is society as a whole that must be called upon to open up opportunities for the younger generations while improving the role of senior citizens.

Today, some three-quarters of the rate of population growth in Europe is the result of international immigration. The phenomenon of immigration can be expected to continue by virtue of the need to compensate, at least in part, for decreases in population. This makes it essential for our societies to commit themselves to the integration of immigrants, and to fostering diversity.

More generally, family or integration policy cannot be dictated by economic necessity alone. The effort to control immigration cannot take precedence over respect for the right of each individual to live in a family. What is at stake in immigration policy, and with respect to the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of our societies, is our general sense of openness and hospitality. We have obligations to these values, particularly if we are Christians.

It must be acknowledged, however, that European institutions have seemed to pose a threat to the integrity of the family. There is a risk that

we will see a negation of differences between the genders, and a refusal to recognize any distinction between the roles of a father and a mother. In this connection, it is important to underscore that neither the current European treaties, nor the Treaty of Lisbon, authorize the European Union to legislate in questions involving the rights of the family and the right to life. These issues remain the exclusive province of the Member States.

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***In conclusion, we call upon all of the citizens of Europe, and upon Christians in particular, to become responsibly involved in the European democratic debate***

European citizens, let us participate in the elections of June 2009. Let us realise what is at stake in building the European edifice, and let us appreciate the hope that Europe continues to represent towards ensuring peace and justice on a global scale. Let us call upon the various political groups to voice a truly European vision for these elections. Let us support the candidates who have dedicated themselves to defending policies in the European Parliament that are inspired by respect for human dignity – towards a Europe in a spirit of greater solidarity, greater respect for future generations, and greater generosity. Responsible voters in the coming election: let us remain unimpressed by populist sloganeering. Once again, the task of building the edifice of Europe is a central issue for Europeans, and it is the mission of the Parliament, more than other institutions within the European Community, to embody the citizenry it represents.

Never before has the mission of the European Union – to serve as an agent of peace in the region and throughout the world – been as clear as it is today. Let us do our part to ensure that it does not miss its rendezvous with history!

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Yves Coulomb  
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## Who we are.

During the 1990s, numerous organisations representing the social teachings of Catholicism in Europe came to the conclusion that it was no longer possible to reflect upon or debate social questions or societal problems without situating them in their European context.

Based on these findings, in 1999 the *Semaines Sociales de France (SSF)* and the *Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK)* came together, and in May 2000 they published a manifesto entitled **Manifesto for a European Consciousness** (available in 7 languages at: <http://www.zdk.de/erklaerungen/>). This was the point of departure of a partnership between the two organisations, a partnership designed to offer an opportunity for Christians of the various countries of Europe to meet. The organisations then convened on several occasions in European cities including Brussels in January 2001; Berlin in February 2002; Cracow in March 2003; Lille in 2004; Saarbrücken in 2006, ...

**12** A **European Working Group** was created in June 2002; in March 2006, it was named the '**Initiative of Christians for Europe**' or, in abbreviated form, **IXE**. An important step by the Group was to draw up a manifesto to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in March 2007; entitled '**Rediscovering the Meaning of the European Construction**', the text is available in nine languages at: [http://www.ssf-fr.org/actu/2007/manifeste\\_ixe.php3](http://www.ssf-fr.org/actu/2007/manifeste_ixe.php3)

**IXE is committed to pursuing four major objectives:**

- to give European Christians who wish to convey the social message of the Church an opportunity to meet and to come more productively to terms with their historic and cultural differences;
- to launch a dialogue with society as a whole, and to articulate statements of position with regard to topics of relevance for the future of European society;
- to encourage reflection about the process of European unification, particularly in dialogue with national and European institutions; and

- to help organise events with a European objective on themes of current social relevance.

Generally speaking, the members of IXE are determined to promote a more energetic European awareness in debates at the national level.

### **Members**

As of the publication date of this presentation, IXE has members in the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, and Ukraine. The Group also includes an observer from the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE).

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