

**The contribution of workers' organisations to the EU Pillar of Social Rights.**  
*Cavaliere Art Hotel, St. Julian's, Malta, 23 -25 November 2017*

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## **The Position of the Church on the European Pillar of Social Rights**

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On behalf of His Grace Mgr Charles J. Scicluna, Archbishop of Malta, I would like to thank the *UHM, Voice of the Workers*, for inviting the Church in Malta to participate in today's seminar on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Article 17(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU encourages EU institutions to enter into an open, transparent and regular dialogue with Church leaders who are also committed to the common good of society. The Church engages in a dialogue with political leaders, trade unions and civil society not to favour its own interests as an institution, but to contribute to the construction of Europe as a project of peace based on the respect for human dignity, the protection of human rights and the pursuit of the common good. As the German political thinker Jürgen Habermas points out, in a modern, democratic and pluralistic society, all voices, including the religious one, can contribute to the wellbeing of society. The Church, as an important stakeholder in society, has the right and the duty to participate in the public square because it is also concerned with the defence of the dignity of every individual, irrespective of one's characteristics.

Lately the First EU Vice-President Frans Timmermans remarked at a high-level meeting with religious leaders held on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017: "The future of Europe is in the hands of its citizens. Shaping that future is our collective responsibility, our shared values our compass. The regular dialogue with confessional organisations, like the one with non-confessional organisations, allows us to address the issue of our common future from different perspectives. It is through inclusive dialogue that we can chart the best course for our common future."<sup>1</sup>

The contribution of the Church to the European project as a community of values has also been highlighted by Pope Francis in his recent intervention addressed to the participants of a high-level dialogue on *(Re)Thinking Europe: a Christian Contribution to the Future of the European Union*, held in the Vatican in October 28, 2017. He reminded Church leaders and political representatives that: "In our day, Christians are called to revitalize Europe and to revive its conscience, not by occupying spaces - this would be proselytizing - but by generating processes capable of awakening new energies in society."<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic Church is a moral force in society with its rich corpus of social teaching that touches on many different aspects of our lives as individuals living in society. The key themes

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission - Press release, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-4342\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-4342_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, <http://www.comece.eu/pope-francis-speech-at-rethinking-europe-dialogue-837>

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of the Church's tradition of social teaching range from the primacy of human dignity to solidarity in the work place, the pursuit of the common good, social justice and the protection of the vulnerable, respect for the natural environment, the dignity of work and the rights of the worker.

The 20 key principles and rights set by the European Pillar of Social Rights to support fair and well-functioning labour market and welfare system are in line with the tradition of Catholic social teaching. Since the announcement by President Juncker of the establishment of a European Pillar of Social Rights, the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) has strongly supported this timely initiative as an effective instrument for breathing new life into the founding idea of a Europe growing together. The Church welcomes this EU initiative as a renewed commitment to promote a social order that ensures an economy that serves the people and reduces poverty. The Bishops stated that, if well implemented, this initiative would improve people's lives, strengthen the citizen's inalienable social rights and therefore the dignity of every citizen.

The economic and financial crisis has shaken the firm belief of Europe growing together. It has revealed that without cooperation and dialogue at EU and global level, the nation state alone is no longer able to address the pressing social and economic challenges of our societies. In a globalised economy, the COMECE Bishops are confident that the European Pillar of Social Rights will renew social convergence in Europe and contribute to the creation of a culture that "drives globalisation towards the humanising goal of solidarity".<sup>3</sup> In a time of recovery from a deep economic and financial crisis and disruptive changes in the labour market, the Pillar, as a shared agreement between the EU, Member States and social partners, can contribute to restore citizens' trust and belief in the project of a more inclusive and fairer Europe.

In his address to the European Union in May 2016, when he was awarded the Charlemagne Prize, Pope Francis emphasised that Europe needs to rise on its feet again, further encouraging the EU to come up "with new, more inclusive and equitable economic models, aimed not at serving the few, but at benefiting ordinary people and society as a whole."<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis emphasised in particular the social market economy, a model that is enshrined as one of the Union's objectives in primary law. The Commission of Bishops of the European Community believes that the focus of European Pillar of Social Rights on (1) equal opportunity and access to the labour market, (2) fair working conditions, (3) adequate and sustainable social protection, is a vital step in the right direction towards the EU Treaty objective of a European social market economy. The Pillar's main objective to consolidate Europe's social dimension and to navigate the European Union integration project in a fair balance between solidarity and subsidiarity is laudable and commendable.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, Encyclical letter, 2009, 42, <http://bit.ly/1904obk>.

<sup>4</sup> Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize – Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160506\\_premio-carlo-magno.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/may/documents/papa-francesco_20160506_premio-carlo-magno.html)

<sup>5</sup> COMECE contribution to the EU consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights, [http://www.comece.eu/dl/LnlqJKJKoKkKJqx4KJK/2016-11\\_17\\_Contribution\\_to\\_the\\_Pillar\\_of\\_Social\\_Rights\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.comece.eu/dl/LnlqJKJKoKkKJqx4KJK/2016-11_17_Contribution_to_the_Pillar_of_Social_Rights_FINAL.pdf)

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The COMECE Bishops welcomed President Juncker's statement of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 at the *Social Summit for fair jobs and growth* in Gothenburg, Sweden, during the Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights: "This is a landmark moment for Europe. Our Union has always been a social project at heart. It is more than just a single market, more than money, more than the euro. It is about our values and the way we want to live".<sup>6</sup>

CEMECE has already offered in 2011 in its statement on *A European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility* (2011) a detailed commentary on the concept of "a highly competitive social market economy".<sup>7</sup> The Bishops highlighted that in this model for European policy, the emphasis should be on the "social" rather than the "highly competitive" dimension in order to offer social protection to the most vulnerable in society. Competition is the means and the "social" is the goal.<sup>8</sup> According to the COMECE Bishops "the notion of a social market economy links the principle of a free market and the instrument of a competitive economy with the principle of solidarity and with mechanisms designed to serve the interests of greater social equality".<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the COMECE Bishops emphasised that "the European social market economy is social policy. With reference to the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, all those in need in the European Union must be given social protection and a guarantee of participatory justice. Our young people have the right to be offered high-quality training and education. The family needs to be cherished as the living source from which to promote the growth of solidarity and responsibility, and must be supported accordingly."<sup>10</sup> The European Pillar of Social Rights and its underpinning model of social market economy is welcomed by the COMECE Bishops as EU's renewed commitment (1) not lose sight of its Europe 2020 strategy, (2) to combat precarious working conditions and (3) to build a solid foundation for the Economic and Monetary Union. The implementation of the principles and rights of the Pillar is impossible without making the social market economy a reality in the European Union by promoting a community of solidarity and responsibility.

The promotion of upward economic and social convergence among EU Member States is at the heart of the European integration project. Yet a thorough analysis of key indicators show that EU Member States are either diverging in terms of socio-economic performance or converging towards deteriorating outcomes. The trend of increased inequality is a crucial threat to the wellbeing of individuals, societies and the EU as a whole. The main objective of the European Pillar of Social Rights is to address these divergences through social convergence and solidarity by strengthening existing rights and improving the social condition in the labour market. The COMECE Bishops welcomed the social rights that are included in the Pillar: minimum wage, minimum income, skills development, equal opportunities, work-life balance,

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<sup>6</sup> Opening speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-17-4723\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-4723_en.htm)

<sup>7</sup> COMECE, *A European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility*, [http://www.comece.eu/dl/KttMJKJOMNkJqx4KJK/20111027PUBSOCMARKET\\_EN.pdf](http://www.comece.eu/dl/KttMJKJOMNkJqx4KJK/20111027PUBSOCMARKET_EN.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility* (2011), 14

<sup>9</sup> *European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility* (2011), 9

<sup>10</sup> *European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility* (2011), 5

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social protection and inclusion, unemployment benefits, old age income and pensions, health care, inclusion of people with disabilities, and access to essential services.

The Commission of Bishops of the European Community recommends the EU to exercise fully its competences and to focus not only on work for dignified working conditions in a changing labour market, but to ensure a dignified life to all. They emphasised that these natural rights are universal and indivisible and their promotion should, therefore, never be withheld from one group. They thus question why the Pillar will just apply to euro countries while leaving it to the discretion of the government of other Member States to join. This approach might undermine the Pillar's primary objective of renewing upwards convergence and, instead, deepen the growing divergence between different regions in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Education is the driving force behind social convergence and as Pope Francis underlined in his speech before the European Parliament in 2014, giving hope to Europe in the current crisis "means investing in individuals and in those settings in which their talents are shaped and flourish".<sup>12</sup> Schools, universities, vocational training sites, but also the family as the fundamental cell of society are the places where young people broaden their knowledge and where creative potential can grow. COMECE Bishops therefore support the emphasis on training and life-long learning endorsed in the Pillar, particularly because many adults in the Union still lack these essential skills. Learning, however, should never be limited to providing technical expertise alone, but rather equip all people in the EU with a suitable and complete education. The Pillar's understanding of education needs to be broadened since it is limited only to technical expertise. Education should promote the integral development of people, skills, life-long learning and access to integrated social benefits and services.<sup>13</sup>

Training and life-long learning in the labour market is essential due to the digital revolution. The prospect of emerging technologies, such as digitalisation, artificial intelligence and industrial robotisation, generates many questions regarding the future of work. COMECE Bishops point out that the challenges and opportunities brought about by the transformation of work require careful attention since the emergence of new employment forms are not yet adequately covered by the EU labour law. While digitalisation creates jobs for high-skilled people, it likewise puts routine-task occupations and thus the livelihood of the lower- and middle-income class at risk and thus increase division rather than upward convergence.<sup>14</sup>

The COMECE Bishops wish to see a paragraph in the European Pillar of Social Rights on decent working hours and a common weekly day of rest.<sup>15</sup> Empirical studies have proven that long and non-standard working hours hold serious negative effects on the health and safety of workers. In addition, irregular working-time arrangement (night shifts, unpredictable on-call duties) and the absence of a synchronized work-free day make family life difficult and prevent

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<sup>11</sup> COMECE contribution to the EU consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights, 1

<sup>12</sup> Address of Pope Francis to the Parliament (2014),  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141125\\_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html)

<sup>13</sup> COMECE contribution to the EU consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights, 13

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2

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citizens from enjoying full participation in cultural, social and religious life. Member States have the duty to protect their citizen and families from the market and its inner logic that is encroaching on all areas of life. The task of governments is to provide guaranteed market-free times and living spaces where people can search for ways to meet these needs. The Catholic and Protestant Churches welcomed the initiative of several Members of the European Parliament when they submitted a Written Declaration “on the protection of a work-free Sunday as an essential pillar of the European Social Model and as part of the European cultural heritage”.<sup>16</sup> Such a declaration constitutes an important commitment to a “Social Europe”.

Another issue raised by the COMECE Bishops in their contribution to the consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights concerns the complete absence of any reference to moral duties. Pope Francis stressed in his address to the European Parliament that rights give always rise to corresponding duties and responsibilities to one other. The Holy Father recommends to “develop a culture of human rights which wisely links the individual [...] to that of the common good, of the “all of us” made up of individuals, families, and intermediate groups who together constitute society.”<sup>17</sup> Following the example of the Preamble of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, the Pillar should also express more explicitly the natural link between rights and duties.<sup>18</sup>

After the joint proclamation of European Pillar of Social Rights by the Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 at Gothenburg, Sweden, the Catholic (COMECE) and Protestant Churches (CEC) welcomed this high-level consensus. In their joint statement, they encouraged the EU and Member States to translate this document into concrete actions, involving all partners, including the Church- and faith-based organisations, in order to create a deeper and fairer internal market for a more social Europe and for the benefit of all people in the EU, including those that look for refuge in our community.<sup>19</sup>

The Churches believe that the persistent economic and social inequality, as well as the transformative changes taking place in the world of work, can be faced only through joint effort that is not only formal, but concrete and tangible, driven by the principles of justice and solidarity. As Pope Francis highlighted recently at his address to the COMECE (*Re)Thinking Europe Dialogue* in the Vatican, a “European Union that, in facing its crises, fails to recover a sense of being a single community that sustains and assists its members – and not just a collection of small interests’ groups – would miss out not only on one of the greatest challenges of its history, but also on one of the greatest opportunities for its own future”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Protection on the work-free Sunday: MEPs launch Written Declaration,  
<http://www.comece.eu/site/en/ourwork/pressreleases/2009/article/7655.html>

<sup>17</sup> Address of Pope Francis to the Parliament (2014),  
[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141125\\_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html)

<sup>18</sup> COMECE contribution to the EU consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights, 8

<sup>19</sup> Churches welcome the European Pillar of Social Rights,  
<http://www.comece.eu/churches-welcome-the-european-pillar-of-social-rights>

<sup>20</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Commission of Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union,  
<http://www.comece.eu/pope-francis-speech-at-rethinking-europe-dialogue-837>

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This requires a sustained commitment by all policy levels, in particular by Member States but equally European, regional and local levels, based on a fair expression of the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. The Churches invited the EU institutions and the Member States to provide the needed financial support to make the initiative a proper policy instrument.<sup>21</sup>

“Time is greater than space.” I would like to conclude with this enigmatic phrase that Pope Francis is fond of using to articulate how we need to live in our constant tension between fullness and limitation. Time is greater than space because the pathway to authentic human progress is a “process”. Because time is fluid and in motion, it represents the key to avoiding being “stuck” in space. If we try to fill space with short-term solutions and static answers to problems with no thought of how we can really move forward from that point, we short-circuit time itself and cut off ourselves from a more hope-filled future. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. What we need is giving priority to actions that generate new processes.

The European Pillar of Social Rights launches another process of a renewed vision of a social Europe where human dignity, justice, solidarity, equality and subsidiarity prevail. It is part of a larger process of an ambitious project of a Europe growing together. The daunting challenges implied in the daring implementation of the ethical principles and social rights of the Pillar need to be transformed into opportunities. What is required is a joint responsibility and a sense of courage, determination and hope inspired by a vision of a social Europe grounded in the firm belief that time is greater than space.

Let us hope that the concerted efforts of the EU, the Member States and the social partners contribute to put into practice the principles and rights of the European Pillar of Social Rights at a EU and national levels for the benefit of both present and future generations residing in the European Union!

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.