



THE CHURCH IN MALTA

**MALTA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:
REFLECTIONS OF THE CHURCH IN MALTA**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union takes place in very challenging times for the Union. Unfolding events could possibly also change the Presidency's planned tempo and dynamics.

EU leaders meeting in Bratislava on 16 September 2016, agreed to reconvene in Malta in the beginning of this year and to use the March 2017 celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, when the Heads of Government meet again in Rome, to set out orientations for the EU's common future. Malta should take the opportunity to give a strong impetus to revitalizing faith in the European Project.

The Catholic Church and European Christian Churches (CEC) urge the EU to return to the values of the EU founding fathers by solving common problems together building on their shared history, and to consider the European project as more than just a common market.

The single market is essential for economic growth which should not be separated from social inclusion.

Many children in Europe are at most risk of poverty, young people are affected by high unemployment. There is long-term unemployed and others suffer deprivation from in-work poverty and precarious working conditions. The EU needs to act quickly to rescue the poor and the weak.

All efforts should include family-friendly measures. The family is the heart of the "culture of life".

Energy security and climate change are closely related and of interest to the rights of present and future generations. Meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change provides a strong opportunity for integrating security of energy supply and accessibility, and sustainability.

The Maltese Presidency needs to urge all EU Member States to maintain the course towards achieving the post-2020 national climate action plans (INDCs) and to keep up the momentum of COP 21 and COP 22. The EU needs to maintain global leadership on climate change.

Malta should consider advancing an EGE proposal for an 'ombudsperson' structure to protect the interests of future generations.

The proposed reforms of the European Union's Common Asylum System, falls short in offering a fair, transparent and efficient asylum system based on high protection standards. Burden Sharing, or "responsibility sharing", and the reform of the Dublin Regulation are the two most important issues that have divided the EU and which exert most pressure on the Maltese presidency.

MALTA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: REFLECTIONS OF THE CHURCH IN MALTA

EMERGING CHALLENGES

The Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union takes place in very challenging times for the Union. The economic recovery which started in 2015 is expected to continue in 2017 when the economies of all Member States are forecasted to continue growing. However, growth rates will differ markedly across the Member States, as will levels of unemployment and particularly youth unemployment which in some Member States are expected to remain at unacceptably high levels. The level of economic resilience of many of the EU Member States is still questionable.

National elections scheduled in key EU countries this year may lead to a change of political leadership in most of them and strengthen the parliamentary representation of Eurosceptic and populist parties raising more difficulties to internal EU dialogue and solidarity particularly on priority policies such as migration.

Shifts in trans-Atlantic relations, European security, instability in many parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, Britain's decision to leave the EU as well as doubts surrounding the implementation, in the coming years, of the climate change mitigation targets as agreed in the Paris Agreement (COP21), are all a source of uncertainty.

These events will affect the Maltese Presidency in many ways, possibly also changing its planned tempo and dynamics.

THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The leaders of the 27 Member States, meeting in Bratislava on 16 September 2016, agreed to reconvene in Malta in the beginning of this year and to use the March 2017 celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, when the Heads of Government meet again in Rome, to set out orientations for the EU's common future. Malta should take the opportunity offered by these events to give a strong impetus to revitalizing faith in the European Project.

In the *Bratislava Declaration*, approved during the meeting, the Member States underlined their determination to make a success of the EU, building on their common history. The *Declaration* captured the situation in these words:

“The EU is not perfect but it is the best instrument we have for addressing the new challenges we are facing. We need the EU not only to guarantee peace and

democracy but also the security of our people. We need the EU to serve better their needs and wishes to live, study, work, move and prosper freely across our continent and benefit from the rich European cultural heritage.”¹

In the Road Map attached to the Declaration, the EU leaders showed a determination to confront common challenges together and find common solutions to issues where the Member States are divided. They pledged to show unity and ensure political control over developments in order to build our common future. They also agreed to clarify what the EU can do, and what is for the Member States to do, to ensure that they can deliver on their promises.²

The *Bratislava Declaration* is in line with the call made by Pope Francis in 2014, when he addressed the Council of Europe and called upon it to overcome indifference and tackle its challenges vigorously.³ Pope Francis referred to the growing trend of an individualistic conception of rights that leads to the *globalization of indifference* born of selfishness and an incapacity to live an authentic social dimension.⁴ This has produced an image of a Europe which is hurt, and which seems no longer capable of facing challenges with its former vitality and energy; a Europe which is a bit tired and pessimistic, which feels besieged by events and winds of change coming from other continents.⁵

Pope Francis urged Europe to reflect on whether its immense human, artistic, technical, social, political, economic and religious patrimony is simply an artefact of the past, or whether it is still capable of inspiring culture and displaying its treasures to mankind as a whole.

In his address to the European Union in May 2016, when he was awarded the Charlemagne Prize, Pope Francis again emphasized that Europe still had the ability to rise on its feet again, further stressing that:

¹ *The Bratislava Declaration*, 16 September 2016, par.2, at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/09/16-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmap/>

² Road Map attached to the *Bratislava Declaration*, par.1, p.3.

³ Address by Pope Francis during his visit to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, *Strasbourg*, France, Tuesday 25 November 2014. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-consiglio-europa.pdf.

⁴ *Ibid.* par.2, p.4.

⁵ *Ibid.* par.3, p.4.

“Creativity, genius and a capacity for rebirth and renewal are part of the soul of Europe. In the last century, Europe bore witness to humanity that a new beginning was indeed possible.”⁶

He also urged Europeans to turn to the founding fathers of Europe in this hour.

“To this end, we would do well to turn to the founding fathers of Europe. They were prepared to pursue alternative and innovative paths in a world scarred by war. Not only did they boldly conceive the idea of Europe, but they dared to change radically the models that had led only to violence and destruction. They dared to seek multilateral solutions to increasingly shared problems.”⁷

In an open letter published in June 2016, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) appealed to Europeans to work together to foster hope and cultivate constructive solutions to our common problems. CEC called for a new vision for Europe – a home for all of us, building on the past and looking to the future with renewed hope.⁸ The letter went on:

“[t]he European Union cannot survive as a beacon of hope if the law of the market is the only guiding principle. We have to recapture the spirit that inspired the founding fathers – including reconciliation, forgiveness, solidarity, human dignity with equal respect for all. The multiple crises that Europe is currently facing are not as great as those suffered after the end of the Second World War, and yet competing interests seem to be paralysing an effective common response.”⁹

The documents just quoted show that both the Catholic Church and European Christian Churches (CEC) identify three important normative objectives: a return to the values of the founding fathers of the European Union, the need to solve common problems together building on the Member States’ shared history, and to look at the European project as being more than just a common market.

⁶ Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the occasion of the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, Sala Regia, Friday 6 May 2016. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/may/documents/papafrancesco_20160506_premio-carlo-magno.html

⁷ Ibid. par.4, p.2.

⁸ “What future for Europe? Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values”, an open letter of the Council of European Churches (CEC) to churches and partner organisations in Europe and an invitation to dialogue and consultation. http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1GB2016_Doc15-Open-letter-Future-of-Europe.pdf.

⁹ Ibid. Point XII.

MALTA EU PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES

Malta has adopted six priorities for its Presidency of the Council of the EU: migration, security, the single market, social inclusion, neighbourhood policy and the maritime sector. The highest priority is expected to be given to the many outstanding and difficult issues concerning migration.¹⁰

(a) The Single Market and Social Inclusion

The single market is essential for economic growth. Growth and social inclusion should not be pursued separately. Market forces alone cannot achieve integral human development and social inclusion. The Nobel Prize laureate and economist Joseph Stiglitz has repeatedly criticized economic growth without a care for inclusion or state intervention on the assumption that a trickle-down of the surplus wealth created would lift practically all sections of society. He warns that gaps between rich and poor are partly the result of economic forces, but equally or even more the result of public choices on such matters as taxation, the level of the minimum wage and the amount spent in health and education.¹¹ Since the very beginning of European integration, social cohesion has always been considered as the handmaiden of economic integration.

In the Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Pope Paul VI said that authentic development cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. "To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man."¹² In *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict XVI reiterated that "[A]uthentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension" and that "[P]rogress of a merely economic and technological kind is insufficient. Development needs above all to be true and integral."¹³ Similarly in the Encyclical letter *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis, referred several times to "full" and "integral" human development.¹⁴ This requires us to work "to eliminate the structural causes of poverty

¹⁰ The *Maltese Priorities for the 2017 EU Presidency of the Council of Ministers*, January-June, at <https://www.eu2017.mt/en/Pages/Maltese-Priorities.aspx>.

¹¹ Stiglitz Joseph (2016), *The Great Divide*, Penguin Books, p.288.

¹² *Populorum Progressio*: Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI on the Development of Peoples, 26 March 1967. par.14, p.3.
http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.pdf

¹³ *Caritas in Veritate* at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html. par.11 and 23.

¹⁴ *Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis, Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24 November 2013.
https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf.

and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.”¹⁵

In its Presidency programme, Malta pledges to give priority to “the extension in time and financial capacity of the European Fund for Strategic Investment ...to help mobilise private investment while making smart use of scarce budgetary resources” with the objective of encouraging growth and jobs.”¹⁶ This is a positive step, but it will be more effective in a broader strategy of social inclusion based on solidarity and respect for what Pope Francis has called the “sacredness of every human life”.¹⁷

In this respect we also wish to recall the statement made by COMECE on the 12 December 2016¹⁸ which drew attention to the many children in Europe who are at most risk of poverty and are stuck in the social class they were born in; the plight of young people, whom Pope Francis described as the ‘catalyst of change and transformation’¹⁹ who are affected by high unemployment; the long-term unemployed and those suffering deprivation such as in-work poverty and precarious working conditions. The EU needs to act quickly to rectify these deficiencies and rescue the poor and the weak.

COMECE went on to call for the inclusion of the family in all these efforts, by family-friendly measures, adding that “Since family is the first resort in difficult situations, the EU should pay special attention to them, ensure their unity, and promote family-centred policies.”²⁰ Pope John Paul II had linked the family to another value that needs to be stressed more in the EU today when he said that “the family is the heart of the culture of life”.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid. par.188.

¹⁶ The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is an initiative launched jointly by the EIB Group and the European Commission to help overcome the current investment gap in the EU by mobilising private financing for strategic investments. <http://www.eib.org/efsi/>.

¹⁷ When he addressed the UN General Assembly in 2015, Pope Francis called for “respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic.”
<https://holyseemission.org/contents//statements/56054736193b87.20279259.php>.

¹⁸ COMECE Statement on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe, 12 December 2016, at http://www.comece.eu/dl/OrrsJKJKolkJqx4KJK/COMECE_poverty_Statement_EN_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁹ Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the occasion of the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize (fn.6 above).

²⁰ COMECE Statement in fn.17, p.3.

²¹ *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, par.39.
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.pdf.

(b) Energy Efficiency and Climate Change

Energy security and climate change are closely related and of interest to the rights of present and future generations. The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* underlines that “the notion of the common good also extends to future generations.”²²

During its presidency, Malta will review “the Energy Efficiency package aimed at reducing energy consumption in residential buildings and industry through improved energy efficiency” and seek to strengthen “security of energy supply for all EU citizens, particularly in times of crises.”²³

Energy Security needs to combine the security of supply and access to it, as well as the production and use of energy in a sustainable way. Meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change which entered into force on 4 November 2016, provides a strong opportunity for integrating security of energy supply and accessibility, and sustainability.

Laudato Si singled out climate change as one of “the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.”²⁴ It threatens all forms of life on this planet. For climate change to be mitigated and reversed we not only need to meet agreed targets but as *Laudato Si* underlines, we require a radical change in the way we live, a shift from the “use and throw away”²⁵ culture to the treatment of climate as a common good, an objective for which Malta has worked since it launched the climate initiative in the UN in 1988.

In the midst of uncertainties in the domain of climate change, the Maltese Presidency needs to actively urge all EU Member States to maintain the course towards achieving the post-2020 national climate action plans [Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)] as submitted by the EU before the Paris Agreement and to keep up the momentum of COP 21 and COP 22 held in Marrakech in November 2016. The EU has a duty to maintain global leadership on climate change to ensure that the Paris targets are eventually met.

Malta should consider promoting a recommendation of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies to the European Commission (EGE) for the appointment by the European Union and its institutions of

“an ‘ombudsperson’ structure to protect the interests of future generations; the function of this office would not be to decide, but to promote enlightened

²² *Laudato Si* – On Care of Our Common Home (2015), par.159.
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf.

²³ *The Maltese Priorities for the 2017 EU Presidency*, op.cit., second priority, “The Single Market”.

²⁴ *Laudato Si*, par.25.

²⁵ *Ibid.* par. 22 forward and par.43.

decisions by bringing into discussions the long-term effects of all political, socioeconomic and technological decisions.”²⁶

(c) Migration

During its presidency, Malta wants to keep migration at the top of the agenda, to swiftly implement measures already agreed and support the establishment of a fully-fledged EU asylum agency to succeed the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).²⁷ A reform of the Dublin Regulation is also considered to be important.²⁸ The Maltese presidency will also focus on the European External Investment Plan to promote sustainable investment in Africa and the Neighbourhood and to tackle the root causes of migration. This policy builds on the EU-Africa Summit which took place in Malta in 2015 when the Trust Fund for Africa was also established to tackle the root-cause of migration.²⁹

With reference to the ongoing reform of the European Union’s Common Asylum System, the Maltese Presidency ought to take into consideration the comments made in July 2016 by several Christian organizations from all denominations to the effect that proposed reform falls short in offering a fair, transparent and efficient asylum system based on high protection standards.³⁰

Burden Sharing, or better still “responsibility sharing”, and the reform of the Dublin Regulation are the two most important issues that have divided the EU and exerted pressure on the Schengen Agreement leading to many Member States re-introducing

²⁶ European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies to the European Commission (EGE). “An ethical framework for assessing research, production and use of energy”, Opinion 27, Brussels 16 January 2013. p.66.

²⁷ The Maltese Priorities for the 2017 EU Presidency, Priority one “Migration”.

²⁸ *Regulation (EU) No 604/2013* of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person, *OJ L 180*, 29.6.2013, p. 31–59. The Dublin Regulation establishes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application. The criteria for establishing responsibility run, in hierarchical order, from family considerations, to recent possession of visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered EU irregularly, or regularly. This places an extraordinary burden on Mediterranean Member States where most of the migrants at sea enter because the onus of the responsibility to examine their application rests on them. Moreover, migrants applying for asylum or who are caught without the necessary residence or entry requirements may be sent back to the Member State where they first entered.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Comments on the Proposed Reform of the Common European Asylum System of 13 July 2016. http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2016-12-21_Christian_group_CEAS_final.pdf.

border controls for brief periods.³¹ These will constitute the most challenging matters for the Maltese Presidency in migration policy and they will test the solidarity of the Member States.

There is a growing emphasis on the need to control the EU's external borders; to dismantle the networks of migrant smugglers; to facilitate legal and circular migration, and increase cooperation with the sending and transit countries. But these efforts need to be pursued in full respect of migrants' rights in accordance with international law.

Stronger external border controls do not free Europe from its obligation to save lives. UNHCR reports that in 2016, the number of people believed to have drowned or gone missing in the Mediterranean reached 5,011 up from 3,771 the year before. Ninety per cent of these deaths occurred on the central Mediterranean route. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 7,189 migrants lost their lives world-wide in 2016, which means that the Mediterranean death-toll amounted to 69.7% of all deaths world-wide.³²

CONCLUSION

Indeed, the task ahead is daunting. The objectives are already complex in themselves, especially in view of the socio-economic and political context in which they have to be implemented. A six-month time frame for implementation calls for a clear vision and a steady and an intense concerted effort under the guidance of an effective leadership.

The Church in Malta is presenting these reflections in a spirit of dialogue, basing her contribution on the values she embraces, which are the values of a great number of Maltese citizens, and on her willingness to contribute to the public good.

Our people are proud of Malta's EU Presidency for the coming six months and will be following the initiatives of the European Council with much more interest than in the past. May the Maltese Government have the cooperation needed to carry out its responsibilities to the best of its abilities.

May the Lord also enlighten the Maltese Government and the other members of the European Council and bless their efforts so that the decisions they take will be of benefit to all those whom they are called to serve.

³¹ The Schengen Agreement has established passport-free travel throughout 22 EU member states (all except six which do not participate in it, namely Britain, Ireland, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania) and includes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

³² IOM, Missing Migrants Project at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iom.intMigrant%20Deaths%20Worldwide%20Op%207100%20-%20Over%20Half%20in%20the%20Mediterranean.pdf>.