



Conference of European Churches
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Religious Leaders meeting the EU Presidents

A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity

"It is my firm conviction that the world of faith can prove a powerful ally in efforts to address issues of democratic rights and liberties. For religion provides a unique perspective – beyond the merely social, political or economic - on the need to eradicate poverty, to provide a balance in a world of globalisation, to combat fundamentalism and racism, as well as to develop tolerance in a world of conflict," H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) emphasised in his address to the meeting of 20 Religious Leaders with the Presidents of the EU Institutions on 30 May 2011.

This message of Metropolitan Emmanuel of France was widely echoed by other speakers in the meeting from the religious communities as well as from the European Institutions.

The annual meeting of Religious Leaders with the Presidents of the European Institutions took place for the 7th consecutive year upon the invitation of the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso. President Barroso was accompanied by Herman van Rompuy, President of the European Council and Dr Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament.

Under the theme "*A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity: a Common Willingness to Promote Democratic Rights and Liberties*" the religious leaders reiterated their commitment to promote democratic rights and values in Europe and in the world, such as the rights of minorities and migrants, economic justice, participation, solidarity, freedom of speech and expression as well as religious freedom.

"One thing is certain," Metropolitan Emmanuel of France highlighted, "any change and any revision of the present situation will inevitably be based on the need to share ... to share our democratic values, to share our prosperity, and to share our planet's resources. In very simple language, this is what in religious terminology is called 'compassion' or 'love'."

The theme of the meeting was triggered by the "Arab spring" and the European financial and economic crisis alike.

"Reflecting together on promoting democratic rights and liberties, I want to emphasise the right to participation, the need for people to participate in the democratic process, in political decision-making, in shaping Europe and the globalisation process. 'Participatory justice' is a term which is often used in churches

as a value and as a right," Bishop Gusztav Bölcskei from the Hungarian Reformed Church, working in close relationship with the Hungarian EU Presidency, told the meeting.

Bishop Antje Jackelén from the Church of Sweden emphasised that: "Our societies need to capitalise on the community building of religion. This is one way of counteracting the destructive consequences of individualism and the privatisation of values... Engaging in interfaith dialogue and diapraxis is a rational choice in these days."

Others, like Metropolitan Nifon from the Romanian Orthodox Church and Bishop Christopher Hill from the Church of England, stressed the need to strengthen the dialogue between the European Institutions and the religious communities. "This dialogue is indispensable," Bishop Hill told the meeting; "it is an important means to avoid fundamentalism breaking ground." In the light of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty on an "open, transparent and regular dialogue" between the European Institutions and the communities of faith and conviction, he added: "we need to develop a culture for this dialogue to make it not just episodic, but regular and to develop it into a give and take."

Metropolitan Nifon stressed the strategic advantage of the churches to be in touch with the people, in big cities and in small villages alike. "As churches, we can bring the voice of the people to the Institutions."

Participants in the meeting from among CEC member churches included:

- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France (Ecumenical Patriarchate)
- H.E. Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church)
- H.E. Metropolitan Athanasios of Achaia (Church of Greece)
- H.G. Bishop Porfyrios of Neapolis (Church of Cyprus)
- Bishop Christopher Hill (Church of England)
- Bishop Antje Jackelén (Church of Sweden)
- Präses Nikolaus Schneider (Evangelical Church in Germany)
- Bishop Gusztav Bölcskei (Hungarian Reformed Church)
- President Jean-Francois Collange (Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace/Lorraine)

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The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 125 Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant, and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, and of 40 associated organisations. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

The Church and Society Commission of CEC provides a platform for the CEC membership to reflect on socio-ethical issues ecumenically and to involve them in common action and advocacy in relation to the European Union, the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the United Nations (in European matters). CSC operates as a forum for action, dialogue and ecumenical training in European affairs.