

## Europe at the Crossroads

### *Justice and Peace Europe: Concerted Action 2017*

The project for a peaceful and unified Europe now stands at the crossroads. This has been shown, not least, by the Brexit-referendum in the United Kingdom in June 2016, which has opened up a period of doubt and uncertainty. It must be seen as an alarming sign of a widespread dissatisfaction and malaise, which calls for convincing answers. In this situation, the political “muddling through”, which for a long time has been a fairly successful strategy, no longer suffices. If the European project is to be revived, there is the need for a clear vision of its outstanding merit combined with a European-wide public discourse about its identity and future as well as the values it stands for. The European Conference of Justice and Peace Commissions (*Justice and Peace Europe*) makes the following ten policy proposals:

1. **In order to maintain the universal right of asylum the common European Asylum system urgently needs to be reformed. For us the following principles must be respected: an unrestricted right to apply for asylum; the sovereign right and obligation of those states who signed up to the Schengen agreement to collectively supervise their common external border; solidarity in sharing administrative costs; and humane efforts to welcome asylum seekers. Furthermore, the EU and its Member States need to agree on a new policy for legal migration.**
2. Market liberalisation within the common market is not an aim in itself. **Therefore, we fully support the proposal for the European Commission to develop a European pillar of social rights, which should act as a reference framework for all citizens.**
3. On behalf of its Member States the European Commission currently negotiates several free trade agreements. We understand the rationale for establishing bilateral trade rules when binding agreements within the multilateral framework of the WTO cannot be secured. However, set against that, many European citizens fear that diminishing trade barriers threaten their jobs and unfairly favour companies which produce their goods in countries with very low or non-existing worker’s rights, safety and environmental norms. **We therefore suggest that the European Commission insists to obtain full guarantees from their negotiating partners concerning the respect of these rights and norms and the transparency of legal proceedings in order to restore trust in a rule-based trade regime.**
4. In the near future the European market economy will be transformed by the so-called digital revolution. The prospect of digitalisation and industrial robotisation generates many questions regarding the future of work. **We therefore propose that the European Commission and the European social partners – trade unions and business – organise a European Labour Conference in order to examine ideas relating to wage subsidies, wage insurance and the job creation.**
5. In principle, there is an agreement on stronger European oversight of economic and fiscal policies of Eurozone members and the need for some form of a Eurozone treasury and a federal budget. Since this requires difficult to achieve changes in the European Union Treaty, **a way forward could be the negotiation of an intergovernmental agreement among the Eurozone countries on the outline of a Euro 2.0 which would include strong criteria in terms of economic and fiscal policy to be respected before its entering into force.** A similar process has been suggested in the Five President’s Report published in June 2015.

## SHORT VERSION

6. One negative aspect of globalisation is the race to the bottom in the taxation of multinationals and very rich individuals.<sup>1</sup> **We expect and hope that EU Member States can agree in the course of 2017 on a single set of rules for companies to calculate their profits, the so-called *Common Consolidated Tax Base*, which the European Commission re-launched in November 2016. Furthermore, we underline the need to address the problem of uncollected VAT, which amounted to nearly €160bn in the EU in 2014.**
7. In his encyclical letter *Laudato si'* Pope Francis called for a 'cultural revolution'<sup>2</sup> with respect to our life style and its consequences for the environment. Indeed many European citizens today support ecological progress. **In order to underpin the efforts for a more sustainable life style of its citizens we hope that EU governments and the European Parliament reach a strong climate compromise in 2017, which should include the reform of the Emissions Trading Scheme after 2020, the proposal for an effort sharing decision on emissions stemming from sectors such as transport, agriculture, buildings and waste, as well as recent proposal for renewables and energy saving.**
8. **We support the idea for a European External Investment Plan as proposed by the President of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker in his State of the Union Speech in September 2016. Member states and other partners should come up with their contribution to this plan in order to reach an amount of 88 billion euro and to contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.**
9. **In order to defend Europe against terrorism, to contribute towards preventing and ending armed conflicts in the world and especially new interstate and intrastate conflicts in its geographic neighbourhood, the European Union needs to reinforce its common security and defence policy as well as its soft policies in peace promotion. It also needs to reinforce its efforts for disarmament, non-proliferation and the control of arms exports.**
10. The European institutions are also regularly attacked as being undemocratic. Indeed things can and should be improved. **Thus, one idea supported by a majority of Members of the European Parliament is to elect at least 10% of the members of the European Parliament from transnational party lists starting with the elections in 2019. We support further debates on this proposal.**

Politics is more than the pursuit of self-interest by strategic and tactical means. In a rapidly changing world a dynamic re-interpretation of Europe's role and responsibility is needed. This is particularly important in a community of states that are strongly interlinked. Europe needs to enhance its capacity "*to integrate, to dialogue and to generate*"<sup>3</sup> as Pope Francis put it. The Catholic Church, together with the other churches as well as other religious communities and indeed all who strive for the common good can help to revive the European spirit of peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Concerted Action of Justice and Peace Europe 2016 "Growing economic inequality and taxation", [http://www.juspax-eu.org/de-wAssets/docs/concerted\\_action/2016/2016\\_JPE\\_annual\\_action\\_Basic\\_text.pdf](http://www.juspax-eu.org/de-wAssets/docs/concerted_action/2016/2016_JPE_annual_action_Basic_text.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> "Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur. (114)"

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pope Francis speech on the occasion of receiving the International Charlemagne Prize on May 6th 2016 in Rome, [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/05/06/pope\\_francis\\_receives\\_international\\_charlemagne\\_prize/1227869](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/05/06/pope_francis_receives_international_charlemagne_prize/1227869) (13/5/16).