



COMMISSION OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

## **European elections 2014**

**The Catholic Bishops of Europe publish today a Statement in view of the upcoming European elections. In this text, they reaffirm their support for the European project. They encourage all citizens of the European Union to go to the polling booths on the 22nd and 25th May, and to start engaging, during the run-up to the election, in constructive dialogue with their MEP's and those who are candidates for seats.**

**At the same time, COMECE invites the Bishops' conferences in the EU, to adopt this text, either by using it as an Election Statement as such or as an inspiration for their own election statements.**

**The text reads as follows:**

Elections to the European Parliament take place on 22 – 25 May 2014. The outcome will shape the legislature of the EU for the next half-decade and will have major implications for those who lead the Union over the coming years.

It is essential that EU citizens participate in the democratic process through casting their vote on polling day. The stronger the turn-out, the stronger the new legislature.

The run-up to the election offers an opportunity for the whole of European society to debate the central socio-economic questions which will shape the Union in the years ahead.

We feel it is our duty, as the Bishops of COMECE, to offer guidance to the EU voter in forming his or her conscience, and we wish to do this by highlighting issues of importance, assessing them through the prism of Catholic social teaching.

Even if we speak, in the first instance, only to those EU citizens who are Catholic, we would hope that our counsel may also receive a favourable hearing from all men and women of good will who care about the success of the European project. We would hope that our voice be also heard by those seeking a mandate to serve in the European Parliament.

We begin by drawing attention to some general considerations:

1. It is the right and duty of every EU citizen to cast his or her vote. Many millions of young citizens will be voting for the first time, some still in education, others in the labour market, but many, alas, unemployed. We urge our young people to make their voices heard by engaging in the political debate and, above all, by voting.

2. It is important that those aspiring to office or seeking to return to the European Parliament be aware of the collateral damage of the banking and economic crises which began in 2008. Pope Francis has drawn public attention to the plight of those already poor and vulnerable, the young and the disabled, not forgetting those pushed into poverty recently by the crisis. The numbers of “new poor” are growing at an alarming rate.

3. The Christian message is one of hope. It is our belief that the European project is inspired by a noble view of mankind. Individual citizens, communities and even nation-states must be capable of putting aside particular interest in pursuit of the common good. The papal exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* issued by Pope John Paul II in 2003 was one of hope, and it is with a firm belief in a better future that the Church approaches the European challenge.

4. Temperance is one of the natural virtues at the heart of Christian spirituality. A culture of restraint must shape the social-market economy and environment policy. We must learn to live with less, but by the same token see that those in real poverty get a fairer share.

There are specific areas of EU policy to which we might also direct the attention of our fellow-citizens:

1. It is important that the increasing moves towards unity within the EU do not sacrifice the subsidiarity principle, a basic pillar of the unique family of nation-states which constitutes the EU, nor compromise the long-standing traditions which prevail in so many of the Member States.

2. Another pillar of the Union but also a principle which is at the base of Catholic social teaching is solidarity. It should be seen to govern policy at every level across the EU, between nations, regions and population groups. We need to build a different Europe, with solidarity at its heart.

3. It is essential to recall that underpinning all areas of socio-economic policy is a vision of man rooted in profound respect for human dignity. Human life must be protected from the moment of conception to that of natural death. The family, as the basic building-block of society, must also enjoy the protection it needs.

4. Europe is a continent on the move and migration – internal and from outside – impacts on the life of the individual and of society. The EU has a common external border. The responsibility of reception and integration of migrants and asylum seekers needs to be shared proportionately by the Member States. It is vital that treatment of migrants at the point of entry be humane, that their human rights be scrupulously respected, and that subsequently every effort be made, including by the Churches, to secure successful integration into host societies within the EU.

5. We are stewards of creation and we must deepen our resolve to respect and attain CO2 emission targets, promote international understanding on climate change, commit ourselves to a greener approach and insist that *sustainability* be a fundamental element of any growth or development policy.

6. Religious freedom is a fundamental feature of a tolerant, open society. This freedom includes the right to manifest one's belief in public. We welcome the EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion and belief, and we hope that the new European Parliament will intensify its work on this important matter.

7. We support all measures to protect the commonly shared weekly day of rest, which is Sunday.

8. Over the next five years demographic change will make a deeper impact on the life of the EU. We plead on behalf of our elderly citizens for the level and quality of care to which they are entitled, but would plead also for policies that create new opportunities for the young.

The European Union is at a turning point. The economic crisis, sparked by the banking collapse of 2008, and the burden of public debt have strained relationships between Member States, has challenged the foundational principle of solidarity across the Union, and has brought in its wake increasing poverty for a huge number of citizens as well as blighting the future prospects of many of our young. The situation is dramatic, for many even tragic.

We, Catholic Bishops, would plead that the European project not be put at risk nor abandoned under current duress. It is essential that all of us – politicians, candidates for office, all stake-holders – contribute constructively to fashioning Europe's future. We have too much to lose if the European project is derailed.

It is essential that all of us who are European citizens go to the polling booths on 22 – 25 May. We Bishops would urge that votes be cast in response to the promptings of an informed conscience.