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EDITORIAL

By Isabelle Ioannides

Regaining trust through dialogue

Under Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has a legal obligation to hold “an open, transparent and regular dialogue” with “churches and religious associations or communities in the member states” as well as “philosophical and non-confessional organisations” (see [BEPA Monthly Brief issue 59](#)).

In view of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the annual high-level meeting with religious leaders on “The future of the European Union”, the last issue of the *BMB* before the summer is dedicated to this dialogue.

Dialogue under art. 17 TFEU constitutes yet another instrument available to the Union to engage civil society in ongoing debates taking place in its institutions, and to allow their ideas to feed – when and where appropriate – into policy-making. Opportunities for citizens to have their say on the European integration process have steadily increased. In fact, today no legislation is tabled at EU level without extensive prior consultation with stakeholders and interest groups. With their unique structure of regional and local chapters that allows them to listen to, exchange and act with citizens, these

stakeholders are also in a position to present the views ‘from the ground’.

In that spirit, BEPA which has been mandated by the European Commission President to lead this effort, organises annual high-level meetings separately with religious leaders and representatives of non-confessional organisations, as well as dialogue seminars to examine with them EU policy issues as diverse as climate change, employment, populism and the EU’s role in the world (see [BEPA Monthly Brief issue 64](#)).

In view of the new institutional mandate, we have asked representatives of the European Humanist Federation and the Catholic European Bishops’ Conference, both of which have been active in this process for years, to give us their views on the future of the dialogue. These articles, which remain the responsibility of their authors, reflect the variety of opinions and approaches of religious and non-confessional beliefs across the EU. A preface and postface cover the history of the dialogue, its structures and tools.

The European institutions recognise the need to bridge the gap with EU citizens, close the democratic deficit, and build together the Europe of tomorrow. And for this to happen, the EU considers that the active involvement of churches, religions, philosophical and non-confessional organisations is decisive.

1 Dialogue under Article 17 (TFEU): origins, development and future perspectives

By *Patrick Roger Schnabel* *

The dialogue between the EU and the “churches and religious associations or communities” as well as the “philosophical and non-confessional organisations” is one of two issues covered by article 17 TFEU. The second is the protection of the status these churches and organisations enjoy under national law.

Origins and evolution of the dialogue

The article first appeared as art. I-52 of the draft Constitutional Treaty and has been included in the Treaty of Lisbon. The above-mentioned issues have, nonetheless, appeared earlier in the history of European integration. While the ‘status’ issue has been part of a soft-law ‘declaration’ accompanying the Treaty of Amsterdam, the dialogue has its origins in 1982, when the European Commission took its first steps to formalise exchanges dating back to the 1960s by appointing a special adviser with the task of liaising with the churches. For another decade, though, the dialogue remained a subject primarily for those who felt the need for spiritual guidance and ethical advice in their daily work in the EU institutions.

A further impulse was needed to trigger more intensive exchanges, which came with the deepening of the EC. While European integration has from the outset been about peace, reconciliation and an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, the means have been – by and large – economic and thus technical. Religion and *weltanschauung* belong to a different sphere. This is not to say that they do not influence economic decisions in general, but the technicalities involved in setting up and running an internal market are certainly not a focus of their social teaching. The daily lives of people, though, are.

Thus a shift to European norms was needed to affect ‘ordinary life’ more visibly and push the churches and non-confessional organisations to intensify their own European commitment and contribute to the elaboration of the discourse on the future of the EU. Likewise, when the EU institutions became more ‘politicised’ they learned

to see people not only as market-citizens, but also as individuals, who, among other things, follow a religion and/or philosophical convictions. With the deepening of the EU, a mutual interest was born that demanded more formalised structures of interaction.

Consequently, former European Commission President Jacques Delors called for an informal, but structured dialogue with those who matter in society and exert influence over the thoughts and hearts of people. He understood that integration could not be achieved from Brussels nor from politicians in the capitals alone, but needed allies deep inside society. Convinced that Europe could not survive as a bureaucracy, but needed “a heart and soul”, he invited the arts, science and religion to contribute to the European project.

The churches are natural allies because their message (and structures) are universal. They have clergy in remote rural areas and their hierarchy entertains relations with elites and society. They are not single-issue organisations, but are engaged more broadly through their vision for human life and practical contribution to social welfare and culture. Also, the churches were receptive to the phrase “a soul for Europe”.

Thus a dialogue on a broad range of issues developed. It goes without saying that, in a pluralistic society, such a dialogue must not be the privilege of some, but needs to be open to all. In that sense, the churches were, in some respect, forerunners paving the way for others. And in the 1990s, those others did join.

Jumping over the bumps along the road

The development of the dialogue as described so far may seem very natural and an almost necessary outcome of the massive changes in the European project since the Single European Act of 1986, which saw the beginning of a quasi-avalanche of treaty revisions up to 2009. In politics, however, there is very rarely something like a natural outcome. In this case, there were indeed many obstacles. The major obstacle was the enormous

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diversity with which member states regulate relations between the state, society and religion.

Having defined itself as “united in diversity”, the EU is used to dealing with the controversies that arise from this plurality, but it also always does so in a constructive manner. However, I cannot think of any other field of legal regulation where the differences are so varied as to become antithetic. And how else would one describe the difference between a secularism that aims at keeping the entire public sphere free from religion, and a state religion that is present in constitution, hymn, parliament, schools, etc.?

The two issues covered by art. 17 TFEU are therefore inextricably linked. If the EU had not guaranteed to uphold this diversity, member states would never have approved such a dialogue at EU level. It is a compromise, and compromises have a cost: a secular state is now part of a supranational Union that mentions religion in its primary law and seeks interaction with religious actors; a “confessional state” is now part of a supranational Union that is entirely void of such a character.

For the member states and the EU institutions, this new dialogue meant a paradigm shift in terms of broadening the range of issues and interlocutors. It also represented a shift in political culture. Religious actors may try to translate their messages into the language of politics and law, but they will always speak from a sphere that must remain detached from the EU institutions. And yet, “recognising their identity and their specific contribution”, EU officials must listen to and engage in dialogue regardless of their own personal convictions.

Engaging in ‘real’ dialogue

Thematically, these exchanges are limited to topics that are of interest to the churches and non-confessional organisations and also within the competences of the EU. The range of topics within these boundaries is large. Religions and non-confessional organisations address the person and life in a holistic manner. Any question pertaining to peace, justice and the integrity of creation relates to the values of these organisations. For example, do EU trade policies impact on development opportunities in the global south? What is the right balance between protecting our borders and giving people (regardless of their origins) the chance to

live in dignity? Do we set the right ethical limits to research? Can the poor and marginalised participate in social life and are they offered real chances for improving their quality of life?

These are some examples of themes tackled in the dialogue. Neither religions nor non-confessional philosophies have all the answers. Their voices are contributions among others. But their advice is often listened to and taken into account by their followers who are also citizens and decision-makers in their respective professional fields. They also have one advantage over typical ‘lobbies’: they do not support specific interests in the material sense, but focus primarily on the common good. In forming their vision of what that common good might be, they are not usually led by institutional self-interest and they must take into account the interests of their own constituency, which can be very broad and diverse.

These features also make them interesting partners for a European administration (and legislature) that needs to do the same: seek allies to strengthen the centripetal forces in a society with many centrifugal impulses, made stronger by rapid diversification. Therefore, it is a great achievement of the Lisbon Treaty that it gives political visibility and legal security to the dialogue established by Delors.

At the same time, the legal norm is also an obligation for the EU institutions to use and improve this dialogue – not for its own sake, but for the advancement of European integration. The EU needs in particular reliable friends and critical companions. Religions and non-confessional organisations can be both. They can be multipliers and promoters of the European idea, and they can help those in positions of political power and administrative responsibility to make Europe better.

In the draft Constitutional Treaty, art. 17 was included in a section titled “The democratic life of the Union”. Europe’s future cannot be shaped either top-down or bottom-up, but only in dialogue across all levels and among all actors. This is complicated, but it makes the best use of resources, competences and commitment. The dialogue according to art. 17 III TFEU draws on a very special source that will certainly bring rewards. The challenge will be – for all partners – to ensure that as many members in their organisations as possible benefit from the results.

2 Article 17 TFEU - the contribution of the Church to the EU

By *Patrick H. Daly**

The late Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter *Ecclesia in Europa*, singled out “openness” as one of the qualities which defined Europe. Whether we imagine Europe as a tapestry, a mosaic or a kaleidoscope, we recognise that our continent’s richness is the fruit of openness to new ideas which challenge us, to foreign cultures which we absorb and make our own, and to people from all parts of the globe whom we have welcomed into our world. Taking the long view back over our continent’s history we can detect a spirit of innovation, a curiosity about what is different, a willingness to experiment and adapt and – even if the darker chapters of our past rightly induce shame – a resolve to open a new chapter in the on-going search to create a better world. The European project is such a chapter.

Dialogue in an ever-changing world

Perhaps because of the diversity of our national and regional languages and the literatures they have produced, and stimulated by the rich variety of our European cultures, we have always been a people keen to communicate with one another. The European project, which is the fruit of courageous men and women talking about their past, repenting of their wrongs, reconciling their differences and discussing their future, would have been impossible without dialogue. And three generations after its launch, it is fair to say that much of its success can be ascribed to European citizens at every level being open to one another and willing to talk. It is important to emphasise, to talk rather than to fight!

The number of member states of the EU has grown to 28 and our institutional framework also has expanded correspondingly. Society too is in rapid transition, the rate of accelerating change since the Millennium is almost bewildering. Europe’s place in the international community too is changing year by year, and

some of that change is profound and long-lasting. In no area has change made a greater impact on the way European citizens live and do business than in that of social communication. We now talk to one another to a great extent, we send a huge quantity of e-mail messages, and interaction is often conducted at the speed of light. The challenges that modern means of communication pose to dialogue are significant, but so too are the opportunities.

The Church has embraced the new means of communication as a vital conduit for its message to the world, but also for its on-going conversation with civil society and with all those in public life and service. Article 17 of the TFEU has capitalised on a rich and fruitful dialogue that was heretofore conducted on an informal basis and has lifted it from good practice to a legal obligation, enshrined in primary law. While still regretting that the Lisbon Treaty contains no explicit mention of God in its preamble, the provision made under Article 17 has been a development which the Church has welcomed. The voice of Christian concern and the religious conscience have been given an official outlet at the highest level within the European Union.

The financial and economic crisis of recent years raises profound questions about whether the current EU institutions and instruments of governance are adequate for the tasks that the Union faces. Do the EU treaties and the institutions, as well as the instruments at their disposal, meet the challenges that contemporary economic, social and political problems raise? Do they make it possible for the EU to adequately accomplish the tasks which the new configuration of realities set before it? To put it more simply, do we need a more relaxed Europe, or do we need more Europe and a deeper integration at the heart of the Union?

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What kind of dialogue in a complex Union?

Article 17 (TFEU) provides an indispensable forum where the questions the Churches and religious communities, drawing on their pastoral experience with such a huge constituency of EU citizens, as well as those on the margins or those excluded from the benefits of our society, feel it necessary to ask. The willingness of those in the most senior positions of leadership within the EU institutions to listen to the Churches and religious communities, the willingness they continually display whenever we meet to take our views on board, and the occasions when we can see our suggestions translated into policy decisions, are all very heartening.

The challenge to the Churches and religious communities to find a “common voice” among themselves remains a reality, particularly at this time of on-going crisis, but the knowledge that we will be provided with the opportunity to articulate our views, share our ‘hopes and fears’, and inform decision-makers of our aspirations, is both encouraging and appreciated.

From the point of view of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), the opportunity for dialogue is particularly welcome. It enables the COMECE to engage with the EU institutions jointly and in a coordinated manner. Through a positive relationship with the institutions, the COMECE analyses and processes information about the policies of the EU so that the national Bishops’ Conferences can take an active part in the integration process.

One of the fruits of a positive spirit of dialogue and an exchange of views is that the COMECE can take positions in regard to the major policy issues of the day. We are primarily concerned with the ethical and social challenges resulting from European political integration. Drawing our inspiration from Catholic Social Teaching, we endeavour to develop practical suggestions and solutions in response to these challenges. We also consult local churches to get a clearer picture of the situation on the ground.

We particularly appreciate the annual Religious Leaders’ Meeting, significant because of the high-level representation of both Churches and faith communities on the one side and the EU institutions on the other. It is also a significant symbol of the commitment to dialogue with the religious communities within the EU. Of enormous value too are the dialogue seminars that the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) organises. The topics selected for discussion are jointly agreed by the Churches ecumenically and presented to the European Commission as a harmonious voice of Christian engagement and concern. This opportunity can only be welcomed and saluted.

Proposals for the future

A further suggestion might be advanced in conclusion. Perhaps the dialogue under Article 17 (TFEU) can continue in more informal settings, with smaller groups, and tackling cross-cutting issues. These dialogue sessions could embrace representatives from the churches, religious communities, the European Commission and the European Parliament. This is an avenue worth exploring.

The Catholic Church’s benevolent interest in the European project goes back to the project’s very beginnings. It has always monitored developments within the Union and has never been afraid to be critical, opposing from time to time legislative proposals. There has nonetheless been a willingness to support its broad ideals, to further European integration (at a pace that wins the democratic consensus), and to remain open to dialogue on how we can move forward together. Sometimes these exchanges have been robust and the questions raised have been very searching. The Church has been resolute in witnessing to the truth in season and out of season, as St. Paul urged us.

At no time is this need for dialogue and willingness to engage in it more acute than in a time of crisis, such as now. For this reason, let the dialogue continue and may all parties involved in it renew their commitment.

3 Une Europe laïque à l'écoute de tous

Par Pierre Galand*

Depuis la fin des années 1980, l'Union européenne (UE) ne fait pas mystère de sa volonté d'accorder une place particulière aux Eglises dans le processus de construction européenne. Que ce soit par le projet de Jacques Delors de donner « Une âme pour l'Europe » ou via des rencontres régulières au plus haut niveau, les Eglises ont bénéficié d'une attention privilégiée de la Commission, du Parlement et du Conseil, comme l'a d'ailleurs rappelé le Président Barroso lors du 10^{ème} anniversaire de la réunion annuelle avec les hauts dignitaires religieux (10 juin 2014). En ce sens l'article 17 du TFUE n'est pas un bouleversement, il n'est que la traduction juridique d'une pratique antérieure.

Oui au dialogue, non au dialogue privilégié

En tant que principal réseau d'organisations laïques en Europe, la Fédération Humaniste Européenne (FHE) est reconnue comme partenaire officiel des institutions européennes sous l'article 17 TFUE. Notre organisation vise à promouvoir la séparation des Eglises et des Etats en Europe, l'impartialité des institutions européennes vis-à-vis des différentes convictions et la construction d'une Europe de libertés, d'égalité, de justice sociale et de solidarité. Nous combattons à ce titre toutes formes de discriminations et luttons contre l'extrémisme religieux en Europe.

Si les hauts dignitaires religieux célèbrent cette année les dix ans de leur dialogue avec les institutions européennes, les représentants des non-croyants (laïques, humanistes, agnostiques, athées) ne peuvent pas en dire autant. Ils ont en effet longtemps été écartés de ce dialogue et n'y participent de manière régulière que depuis 2010.

Dès l'origine, la FHE s'est opposée à l'instauration d'un dialogue spécifique entre les institutions européennes, les représentants religieux et les organisations philosophiques. Non par volonté d'écarter les Eglises du dialogue européen, mais parce que nous pensons que ce dialogue doit s'inscrire dans le

cadre du dialogue prévu avec les organisations de la société civile à l'article 11 du traité sur l'UE. Il est légitime que les revendications – notamment éthiques – des croyants et non-croyants puissent être entendues par les institutions européennes. Il est également légitime que les représentants religieux et organisations philosophiques puissent en être les relais, sous réserve qu'ils remplissent les critères de transparence, de représentation démocratique et respectent les principes fondamentaux de l'UE. Cependant, il n'existe selon nous aucune raison de leur reconnaître une « contribution spécifique » à la marche de l'UE et de leur offrir un accès aux plus hautes instances européennes distinct de celui de la société civile.

Vers un dialogue inclusif et une coopération renforcée

Les représentants religieux ont néanmoins obtenu l'inscription de ce dialogue dans le marbre du Traité de Lisbonne. Or, l'Union européenne doit respecter une impartialité stricte à l'égard des différentes convictions de ses citoyens. La FHE a dès lors choisi de s'engager dans ce dialogue pour garantir l'équité de ce nouveau dispositif et s'assurer que les revendications des laïques seraient également entendues.

Cela n'a pas toujours été facile mais nous sommes heureux de constater une volonté réelle des institutions européennes de renforcer la place des laïques au sein de ce dialogue. Afin de poursuivre dans cette voie, nous demandons à la Commission européenne d'intégrer cette bonne pratique dans ses lignes directrices relatives à la mise en œuvre de l'article 17 TFUE. Nous appelons également le Conseil de l'UE, et plus précisément ses présidences tournantes, à s'efforcer de respecter cette exigence d'équilibre et d'équité entre les différentes convictions.

Fortement attachée à la Charte des Droits Fondamentaux de l'UE, la FHE appelle les

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institutions européennes à centrer le dialogue avec les organisations philosophiques autour des thèmes suivants :

- La montée des mouvements extrémistes et populistes en Europe. Si la responsabilité de la lutte contre ces mouvements relève en premier lieu de la responsabilité des Etats membres, l'UE doit cependant réfléchir à la manière de préserver les valeurs qui sous-tendent le projet européen (définies à l'article 2 TFUE). Face à des cas très problématiques d'abus dans certains Etats membres, l'UE doit également proposer de nouveaux outils pour faire respecter l'Etat de droit par les pays membres de l'UE. Dans cette thématique doit également s'intégrer une réflexion sur la gouvernance de l'UE et la place consacrée à la participation de ses citoyens ; réflexions auxquelles la FHE est prête à contribuer.
- La protection de la liberté de religion et de croyances au sein de la politique extérieure de l'Union européenne. En 2012 et 2013, la FHE a été étroitement associée à la rédaction des nouvelles lignes directrices de l'UE sur la liberté de religion et de conviction pour promouvoir cette liberté au-delà des frontières de l'UE. Notre organisation se tient à la disposition du Service européen pour l'Action Extérieure pour toute consultation sur le suivi de l'application de ce nouvel outil et appelle l'UE à appliquer les mêmes principes à l'intérieur de ses frontières.
- La défense des libertés fondamentales au sein de l'Union européenne. La FHE est fortement attachée à la promotion de la liberté d'expression, qui entre parfois en conflit avec certaines revendications religieuses. Dans les lignes directrices mentionnées ci-dessus, l'Union européenne a souligné la nécessité pour les Etats tiers de supprimer les lois sur le blasphème encore en application. Etant donné que de telles lois existent encore au sein même de l'UE, nous pensons qu'il est de la responsabilité des institutions européennes de défendre cette position dans l'espace européen, y compris par des instruments non-contraignants.
- L'égalité et la non-discrimination au sein de l'Union européenne. La FHE est également prête à poursuivre le travail amorcé avec la Commission en juin 2012 pour discuter des exemptions religieuses relatives aux directives anti-discrimination de l'UE qui peuvent aboutir à des conflits de droits. Dans une perspective plus large, nous souhaiterions être consultés sur tout sujet ayant trait au thème de l'égalité des droits, en ce compris l'égalité de genre, la non-discrimination envers les personnes LGBT et la lutte contre l'homophobie.
- Enfin, sur le terrain éthique (droits sexuels et reproductifs, recherche sur les cellules souches, etc.), nous pensons que les Eglises ne peuvent rendre compte des conceptions de l'ensemble des citoyens européens et sont d'ailleurs bien souvent à contre-courant des évolutions sociétales et des opinions publiques. C'est une des raisons pour lesquelles il est important de faire entendre un point de vue laïque sur ces sujets.

Concernant la forme du dialogue, à côté des rencontres de réflexion générale menée avec les Présidents de l'UE, la FHE plaide pour l'organisation de réunions plus techniques avec les fonctionnaires de la Commission européenne concernés par les sujets traités. Cela permettrait de mobiliser plus efficacement l'expertise des acteurs en présence et d'avancer concrètement sur des dossiers d'intérêt commun et de compétence de l'UE.

L'Europe est avant tout un ensemble de citoyens vivant dans un espace commun avec des valeurs partagées énoncées dans la Charte des Droits Fondamentaux. Celle-ci constitue un programme pour la construction d'un avenir de liberté, d'égalité, de justice sociale et de solidarité dans un espace laïque, démocratique et pacifique. Ce programme est d'autant plus urgent à réaliser au vu de la consolidation des partis d'extrême droite, eurosceptiques et obscurantistes dans l'UE. Viscéralement opposés aux valeurs et à l'agenda de ces groupes, les laïques poursuivront leurs efforts auprès et avec les institutions européennes pour promouvoir la construction d'un avenir progressiste en Europe.

4 A living dialogue

By *Katharina von Schnurbein**

Over the years, the EU institutions and in particular the European Commission, have developed a dialogue that is probably unique in the world. The European institutions seek the opinion of churches, religions and non-confessional organisations to feed their views into the policy-making process. As such, the EU institutions acknowledge the fact that those stakeholders represent a significant voice in society and are often of a specific nature, one that goes beyond a mere civil society organisation. With the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Union has enshrined the existing dialogue in primary law (art. 17 TFEU), where it expresses its respect for the specific nature of these organisations.

Shaping the dialogue

Dialogue partners can be churches, religious communities as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations that are recognised as such at national level and adhere to European values. Over the years several dozen organisations have been involved in the dialogue, and more recently have registered in the Joint Transparency Register. In line with its guidelines, the Commission aims at an open and balanced dialogue that takes into account the representativeness, diversity, geographical balance and range of interests of the dialogue partners.

It has become a tradition to gather once a year high-level church leaders and other religious dignitaries (since 2005) as well as representatives of philosophical and non-confessional organisations, such as the humanists, the freethinkers or free masons (since 2009), to discuss important EU-policy matters.

Thus in June 2014 for the tenth time, high-level representatives from Catholic, Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Christian traditions, Muslim and Jewish tradition, and some religions with “shorter presence in Europe” met with EU leaders on the invitation of President José Manuel Barroso, co-chaired by the Council

President Herman van Rompuy and the Vice President at the European Parliament, László Surján. Just after the EP elections and at a moment of crisis in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood, they exchanged views on current societal developments in the EU, Europe’s role in the world, and on how religions can contribute in this context. The participants adopted a joint declaration asking for the immediate release of a Sudanese Christian sentenced to death for apostasy (which has since happened). This statement was particularly important as the religious leaders included Sunni and Shia Muslims.

At the recent high-level meeting, President Barroso expressed his hope that “this high-level dialogue will remain a fruitful platform in the future”. These meetings are at the heart of this “open, transparent and regular” dialogue. The dialogue is not about religion or philosophy, which is essentially a matter for each individual. Rather, the Commission understands this dialogue as a two-way lane: on the one hand, given the interests of the individual organisations, the European Commission stands ready to discuss policy issues where the EU has a competence, such as migration, the fight against poverty, the labour market, youth unemployment, social integration or the neighbourhood policy.

Many of the so-called “life stance issues” that are often a source of divide between the dialogue partners, such as abortion, euthanasia, the wearing of the head scarf or crosses in public spaces are member state competence, and thus are not subjects addressed in the context of the dialogue.

The EU will, on the other hand, pro-actively seek advice from the religious and non-confessional organisations where they have a specific competence. In 2012, all dialogue partners were invited to contribute to the EEAS drafting process of the *EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion and Belief* adopted in June 2013. The

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outcome was tangible and rewarding for all sides. Many of the dialogue partners have a holistic view on society rather than pushing the interests of their organisations or single issues. They will raise concerns with a view to climate change, the labour market, social legislation, populism. They tackle questions such as, how does this policy affect certain groups in society and is it to the benefit of society at large? What are the responsibilities of each individual actor in the process? These reflections are important in the policy-making process.

Looking forward

For more than twenty years, this dialogue has been “work in progress”. It has developed into an instrument of participatory democracy in the policy-making process. It has become more inclusive, has embraced the diversity of European society, and has already covered a variety of topics. The dialogue will remain flexible with view to its structure, instruments and dialogue possibilities. One can envisage working in smaller groups, interlinking better the relevant actors across the three big EU institutions, and continue to hold targeted *ad hoc* consultations.

The European Charter on Fundamental Rights which mentions “freedom of religion and belief” as a fundamental right (with its consequences to EU legislation and policy) has become part of EU primary law. In that light, religious and non-confessional organisations increasingly refer to their rights and expect the Commission to act.

Questions of religion and non-confessional belief are increasingly relevant in society, and “literacy of religion and belief” will become more and more an asset for policy-makers. Policies such as migration, development, social integration, anti-discrimination will be all the more successful if the effect of religions or beliefs on the daily lives of those who are targeted by the policy are factored in from the beginning.



Meeting with philosophical and non-confessional organisations on “Putting citizens at the heart of the European project in times of change”, on 5 November 2013.



10th Anniversary of the Annual High-level Meeting with Religious Leaders on “The future of the European Union”, on 10 June 2014.

President Barroso wrote recently: “Finding ways of living together even when we have other points of departure, different approaches and diverging responses is one of the great challenges of our time and places a responsibility upon each of us”. It is in this spirit and by taking a holistic approach that the Commission aims at continuing the dialogue with churches, religions, philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

The next Commission will have to help find answers as to how to accommodate the ever increasing diversity in societies across the EU.

5 Think Tank Twitter

Think Tank Twitter (TTT) aims to provide regular information and updates on what is produced by think tanks and research centres across Europe (and beyond) on EU policy issues. As an analogy to the original Twitter, each summary – or tweet – does not exceed 140 words, rather than characters. Those who wish to signal new publications for possible inclusion can send them to the email address bepa-think-tank-twitter@ec.europa.eu

The 2014 EP Election Campaign in the Member States: National debates, European elections

Three factors indicated that the 2014 EP elections would affect voting differently: the Treaty of Lisbon has increased the EP's powers; the election results would shape the designation of the next Commission President; the EP has gained visibility through its response to the crisis. National politics remained at the forefront of the campaign in many countries because of an overlap with national elections; elections coincided with a domestic political crisis; or the national political class, media or voters were disinterested. The campaign was not dominated by national issues everywhere: in about 1/3 of member states the debate focussed on the EU and its policies. The EU 'Spitzenkandidaten' seem to have had a limited impact except in Germany and Luxembourg, the home countries of the two main candidates.

<http://www.tepsa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TEPSA-Report-EP-election-campaigns-Mirte-van-den-Berge.pdf>

The New European Parliament: Workable but impaired?

In the incoming EP, the grand coalition between the EPP and the S&D will be necessary and will require stronger internal discipline and support from the Liberals (and the Greens when possible). Alternative right or left coalitions will no longer be feasible. The ECR will be more powerful, although its new affiliations will weaken its internal cohesion. These elections have brought radical parties to the forefront, pushing the EP governability against the ropes. Considering the growing EP role in EU law- and decision-making and its responsibility to ensure democratic legitimacy at EU level, the grave situation warrants at least a serious debate on citizens' increasing disenchantment with 'politics as usual' and the need of a common electoral law that promotes – as is the case at national level – governability and democratic standards.

<http://www.ceps.eu/book/new-european-parliament-workable-impaired>

After the Elections What Are the Prospects for the European Union?

This report shows that a great majority of Europeans believe that the lives of the young generation will be more difficult than their own. Concerns about the role of the EU on the global scale are also highlighted. Unemployment is seen as the main challenge in all member states bar Germany and Estonia, where government debt and an ageing population respectively are deemed a greater problem. The EU's assets which hold most potential for the future, such as research and innovation, are not highly valued by its citizens. The increased politicisation of the EU institutions is seen in a positive light by the author as it increases its legitimacy. In this respect, the entrance of new political figures on the European stage should be encouraged.

<http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0318-after-the-elections-what-are-the-prospects-for-the-european-union>

Post-European Parliament Elections Analysis

The success of diverse anti-EU parties has shifted the focus from a financial crisis to a political crisis. What is clear is that no one knows how to deal with this 'new' crisis. Broadly speaking, it is national rather than European parties that campaign: ultimately they do not address European issues, or in this case the Spitzenkandidaten experiment. The impact of the 'anti' parties at national level is concerning; signs that national parties and governments will adapt their positions to align with some of the rhetoric of these parties are beginning to show. National governments must give more thought to the link between the European elections and the candidacies for the role of Commission President, given that this process was 'sold' as one way in which voters could influence more the running of the EU.

http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_4464_post-ep-elections-analysis.pdf

Undercutting the Future? European research spending in times of fiscal consolidation

There is an increasing research and innovation (R&I) divide in Europe between (a) innovation-lagging and fiscally weak countries in the EU, and (b) innovation-leading and fiscally stronger countries. The EU with its growing European Commission-managed R&I resources can only partly redress this increasing divide. But the Commission has not fully used its powers to allow member states in weak fiscal positions to maintain public R&I support. Furthermore, the application of fiscal rules has not taken R&I into consideration. An assessment of the long-term impact on growth is required to evaluate the European Commission recommendations on public R&I as part of the European Semester. The Commission should use operational models blending micro and macro evaluations to evaluate how member states' public R&I proposals and the 'investment clause' should be implemented.

<http://www.bruegel.org/publications/publication-detail/publication/829-undercutting-the-future-european-research-spending-in-times-of-fiscal-consolidation/>

A Persistent Threat: The evolution of al-Qa'ida and other Salafi-jihadists

This report examines the status and evolution of al-Qa'ida and other Salafi-jihadist groups, a subject of intense debate in the West. Following an extensive analysis of primary sources, the report concludes that there has been an increase in the number of Salafi-jihadist groups, fighters, and attacks over the past several years. This analysis is used to build a framework for addressing the varying levels of threat in different countries, from engagement in high-threat, low government capacity countries; to forward partnering in medium-threat, limited government capacity environments; to offshore balancing in countries with low levels of threat and sufficient government capacity to counter Salafi-jihadist groups. There is a need to establish a more adaptive counter-terrorism strategy that involves a combination of engagement, forward partnering, and offshore balancing.

http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR637.html

Energy Subsidies – to be or not to be

Europe needs security of supply and decarbonisation at an affordable cost. There is no transparency surrounding EU energy subsidies and no official figures because of a lack of harmonised accounting – a problem that has been pointed out for over a decade. In order to avoid high energy prices harming European industrial competitiveness, a two-tier regime is proposed in which adequate rules would be laid out for industries with very significant energy costs. The price of solar and wind power is approaching market competitiveness. However, support for these fields should continue in the form of research and development. There is a need for a truly integrated internal market, but this would require significant investment from the member states. A major task facing the next Commission is to tackle the fiscal issues in this field.

http://www.friendsofeurope.org/Portals/13/Documents/Reports/2014/FoE_Report_Energy%20Subsidies_05_06_2014_WEB.pdf

Productivity and Digitalisation in Europe

Committing to productivity growth through innovation and digitalisation is key to achieving the Europe 2020 goals. Improved economic conditions can only be sustained through growth in labour productivity. The potential of digitalisation to accelerate growth will come primarily from the use of these technologies by industries in the non-ICT sector. Structural reforms that help to reallocate resources away from less productive activities to more productive sectors are the necessary starting point. Establishing the digital single market in practice and creating a single market for content and services are conditions required for the creation of scale effects. The EU role in implementing policies that drive market integration is probably the most important prospect for a growth bonus, beyond the performance of individual economies and the articulation of a cross-cutting vision endorsed by all stakeholders.

<http://www.lisboncouncil.net/news-a-events/548-productivity-and-digitalisation-in-europe.html>

6 BEPA News

Départs

Adriana Oltean a quitté le BEPA et a rejoint l'administration du Land de Brême, en Allemagne, où elle participe au « Young Professionals Programme ». Nous lui souhaitons une bonne continuation.

Evénements

Le 5 juin, le directeur général et deux conseillers du BEPA ont reçu une délégation d'étudiants en affaires publiques de l'université Paris Dauphine. Ces derniers, accompagnés d'un de leurs professeurs, faisaient un voyage d'étude au cœur des institutions bruxelloises. La rencontre a été l'occasion de leur présenter le rôle du BEPA, suivie d'un échange de vues portant sur différentes problématiques d'actualité telles que le résultat des élections européennes et ses conséquences institutionnelles, et la proximité de la Commission avec les préoccupations des citoyens.

Le 5 juin, le groupe interservices sur l'éthique et les politiques européennes, coordonné par le BEPA, s'est réuni pour échanger sur l'implication des citoyens dans le développement des politiques, de la science et de l'innovation. Les participants ont discuté d'initiatives clés lancées par la Commission, telles que le Dialogue avec les Citoyens de la DG Communication, l'« Open Digital Science » de la DG Réseaux de Communication, Contenu et Technologies, et des projets de la DG Recherche et Innovation permettant au public d'influencer les priorités concernant le financement de la recherche par l'Union européenne.

Le 10 juin, a eu lieu pour la dixième fois la rencontre annuelle avec les leaders religieux. Le président de la Commission José Manuel Barroso, le Président du Conseil Herman van Rompuy et le Vice-Président du Parlement européen László Surján ont reçu une vingtaine de représentants des communautés chrétienne, musulmane, juive, hindoue, sikhe et mormone. Les participants ont échangé leurs vues sur, entre autres, l'évolution de la société dans et en dehors de l'Union Européenne, sur le rôle de l'Europe dans le monde et dans le voisinage immédiat, ainsi que sur le rôle que les religions peuvent jouer dans ce contexte. Les participants ont également rendu hommage aux victimes de l'attentat du musée juif de Bruxelles le 24 mai dernier, et ils ont adopté une Déclaration commune concernant

Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag, une chrétienne soudanaise condamnée à mort pour apostasie. Cette déclaration est en ligne : http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-14-186_en.htm?locale=EN

Le 17 et 18 juin, le Groupe Européen d'Éthique s'est réuni afin de commencer à travailler sur un nouvel Avis, qui abordera le thème de l'engagement des citoyens dans la poursuite des avancées scientifiques, qu'ils soient acteurs de l'innovation ou sujets d'observation, particulièrement dans le domaine de la santé. Les membres du Groupe ont pu suivre des présentations de la DG Réseaux de Communication, Contenu et Technologies et de la DG Recherche et Innovation, ainsi que du Professeur Barbara Prainsack de la King's College à Londres. La prochaine réunion du Groupe se tiendra les 16 et 17 septembre prochains.

Le 26 juin, dans le cadre du Dialogue dit de l'Article 17 (TFUE), le BEPA a organisé une rencontre avec une délégation d'évêques catholiques et de professeurs d'universités des Etats-Unis. Les participants ont débattu sur le changement climatique et sur la politique de voisinage, en compagnie de hauts représentants de la Commission européenne.

Evénements à venir

Le 7 juillet, les membres du Conseil Consultatif pour les Sciences et Technologies (STAC) se rencontreront lors d'une réunion de travail pour discuter de leur rapport « Le futur de l'Europe est la science » – qui sortira lors de la conférence du même nom en octobre. Ils aborderont le contenu du rapport ainsi que les recommandations principales sur la manière dont l'Europe peut tirer profit au mieux des opportunités qu'offrent les sciences et les technologies. Les membres échangeront également sur l'enquête Eurobaromètre portant sur les perceptions par les citoyens de l'avenir à travers le prisme des sciences et de la technologie.

Le 9 septembre, le STAC tiendra également sa septième réunion officielle, lors de laquelle les membres finaliseront leur rapport, après un échange de vues avec le Président. Ils discuteront également de la sortie de ce rapport lors de la conférence d'octobre, organisée à la demande du Président par le BEPA, l'équipe de la Conseillère Scientifique Principale et le Centre Commun de Recherche.