



Commission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
Kommission der Bischofskonferenzen der Europäischen Gemeinschaft

Hope, Trust and Solidarity

*A statement on the accession of new Member States to the European Union by the
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
in view of the European Council in Copenhagen*

“If a new European order is to be adequate for the promotion of the authentic common good, it must recognise and safeguard the values that constitute the most precious heritage of European humanism.

Multiple are the cultural roots that have contributed to reinforce these values: from the spirit of Greece to that of Roman law and virtue; from the contributions of the Latin, Celtic, Germanic, Slav and Finno-Ugric peoples, to those of the Jewish culture and the Islamic world. These different factors found in the Judeo-Christian tradition the power that harmonised, consolidated and promoted them.”

Pope John Paul II¹

1. We, the Bishops of COMECE, believe the accession of ten new Member States to the European Union, which the European Council is expected to confirm at its summit in Copenhagen on 12-13 December 2002, to represent a profoundly significant transformation in our continent's history. This community of different cultures will constitute a step towards a European common good. For us therefore, this is not the “enlargement” but the “Europeanisation” of the European Union.
2. The Catholic Church is and has always been supportive of the efforts of outstanding political leaders and citizens to bring lasting peace and well-being to our continent through a “community of solidarity” based on economic and political integration. As we explained in our statement “Building a Spiritual Bridge of Unity Between Peoples” on 9

¹ *From the message of Pope John Paul II to the congress “Towards a European Constitution” organised by the European Federation of Catholic Universities, 20 June 2002*

May 1997, “enlargement is an opportunity concretely to promote and realise throughout the whole of Europe fundamental values which are also of primary importance to the Church: solidarity, mutual respect and friendship between peoples”².

3. The European Union is founded on universal values. The Gospel of Jesus Christ provides the source and inspiration for many of these values. Inspired by the Gospel, and in view of the imminent challenge of integrating ten new Member States into this community, we commend to our political leaders and all current and future citizens of the European Union hope, trust and, above all, solidarity.

Hope

4. The Europeanisation of the European Union through the accession of ten new Member States is a source of hope, an opportunity for renewal of the Union and its original mission to promote freedom, justice, peace and prosperity both within and without its own borders. The project of European integration was born from the hope of reconciliation, the hope that Europe would never again suffer the destruction of war and conflict. Today its task is still to consolidate reconciliation by “sealing the end of an unnatural division”³ between East and West in Europe. In this way, the accession of ten new Member States will help to realise a hope particularly cherished by the Church: that “Europe must breathe with both its lungs”⁴. This project should now provide a source of hope to other European countries and peoples.
5. Europeanisation will enrich the European Union, providing it with a new cultural and historical quality and identity. This inevitably and rightly opens a debate about the finalities and limits of the integration project.. The Union’s relations with its new neighbours should be based on trust, solidarity and hope for a peaceful and mutually prosperous future. The European community can and should also provide a sign of hope to other regions of the world seeking to build on this model of peaceful integration, notably in Africa and Latin America.

Trust

6. Becoming a member of this European Union does not only entail rights and entitlements, it also means “respecting the identity of other nations and involves the right of co-deciding about the shape of future Europe”⁵. This requires us to respect both the community and the diversity of cultural traditions in the political order. Every member is equal in the Union, and so must work not only in their own interests but in the interest of the whole community. In the enlarged Union, this will require a renewed commitment of trust from all Member States and the full recognition of the community institutions, to which the Member States have entrusted the indispensable task of working for the common good.
7. The economic and political interdependence of this community rests on trust not only between the leaderships of its Member States, but also among the citizens. As we said in 1997, “a spiritual bridge of unity between peoples” must be built, and so we welcome and encourage the manifold initiatives taken by institutions, groups and individuals across

² Copies of the statement are available from the COMECE Secretariat

³ From the speech of Pope John Paul II to the Italian Parliament, 14 November 2002

⁴ Pope John Paul II, on numerous occasions

⁵ From the statement of the Polish Bishops on European integration, 21 March 2002

Europe to build trust between the continent's peoples. Such initiatives should receive more support from political authorities.

Solidarity

8. "The EU must be a community of values that are developed thanks to the solidarity of its members."⁶ Solidarity is the expression of Christ's command to love, and to make the accession of ten new Member States a success will require solidarity on the part of all. The process of economic development and political reform is not yet complete. The current Member States will be required to reform existing policies, most notably regarding the Common Agricultural Policy⁷, and to share the structural aid which they receive with the new Member States. Both the current and the new Member States must remain committed to this process if the citizens are to enjoy fully the fruits of accession to the European Union. Such solidarity will be especially necessary in terms of the revision of the Community's financial perspectives following the expiry of Agenda 2000 in 2006. For the new Member States, the benefits of accession may not become evident immediately, and they will therefore be called upon to recognise and respect the solidarity demonstrated by the current Member States even if its effects are not immediately quantifiable. Both the current and new Member States should participate on an equal basis in the Intergovernmental Conference that will be called following the presentation by the Convention of a draft constitutional treaty of the European Union.
9. The great efforts and achievements associated with enlargement should not cause us to forget Europe's responsibility for global development. When they join the European Union, the new Member States will become members not only of a single market, but also of the world's biggest donor of humanitarian and development aid. We urge the European Union to fulfil its commitment to devote 0.7% of the Union's GDP to Official Development Aid. This should be based on a fair distribution of the burden proportionate to each state's capacities. We also call on the enlarged European Union to serve the global common good by applying the same commitment to just trade, sustainable development and solidarity with the poorest regions of the world as they have within the European Union.

Building new bridges

10. It is essential that the accession of ten new Member States does not lead to new divisions in Europe. Bulgaria and Romania have already undertaken great efforts to prepare for EU membership but are not yet ready to complete the accession negotiations. We encourage them to continue those efforts and welcome the Union's commitment to increase its assistance in order to help them achieve their own objective of joining in 2007. Turkey and the countries of South Eastern Europe have been recognised as candidate or potential candidate states but have not yet begun accession negotiations. We hope that, for the sake of the common good, they will continue to implement the wide-ranging reforms required in order to meet the economic and political criteria established by the European Council in Copenhagen in June 1993, especially that of "guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities"⁸.

⁶ *From the pastoral letter of the Slovak Bishops on European integration, 15 September 2002*

⁷ *See the COMECE discussion paper "Towards sustainable agriculture in Europe", 29 November 2002*

⁸ *Copenhagen European Council, Presidency Conclusions, 23 June 1993*

11. The removal of frontiers within the new European Union must not lead to the construction of a “fortress Europe” at its external limits. Whilst maintaining external borders is necessary in order to protect the freedom and security of those who live within them, and monitoring them can be important in preventing abuses of human dignity such as the trafficking of women and children, migrants and refugees – whatever their status – should be treated with compassion and justice. With regard to their countries of origin, the Union has a responsibility not only to promote conditions – such as peace, democracy, and the rule of law – which would remove the need for refugees to seek asylum, but also to address the root causes which make people leave their country and risk everything in order to reach better conditions of life in the EU.

Conclusion

12. As Christians, “we cannot be mere spectators of the political processes in Europe”⁹. Our task is to engage creatively in the search for solutions to socio-ethical challenges, which will promote the common good and the dignity of the human person in accordance with the universal values espoused by the Christian view of humankind. The debate in the European Convention, which is the first occasion on which representatives of both the current and the new Member States have been invited to co-determine the future of the European Union, is an opportunity for us all to help define the values and objectives of our common project. With hope, trust and solidarity, we as Bishops undertake to continue supporting and contributing creatively to that project and we encourage all believers and citizens to share in this common endeavour.

Brussels, the Feast of St Nicholas, 6 December 2002

⁹ *From the pastoral letter of the Slovak Bishops, ibid.*