

FOR A EUROPE OF
DIGNITY, FREEDOM
AND
RESPONSIBILITY



Election
Manifesto

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For a Europe of Dignity, Freedom and Responsibility

Introduction

If the economic crisis has revealed anything, it is for certain that a growing number of people in Europe feel disconnected from the European Union as institution and idea.

The ECPM accepts the EU as a political and social reality. A reality that has brought stability and improved life over the years for many people in Europe. But the EU is in need of a new paradigm based on the Christian understanding of the human being, in order to restore the relation between the European idea and the people living in the member states. We believe the EU has become a project of an elite that is largely out of touch with the reality in the Member States. The European project will only be sustainable if the gap between Brussels and the European citizens is closed.

There are many people working in the European institutions as MEP's, civil servants and Commissioners with the intention to contribute to the development of the European Union and the wellbeing of its citizens. However, it is clear that these efforts, well-intended as they may be, did not restore this relation between the EU and the citizens.

Towards a Europe we can relate to

There are signals that the economic crisis of the last five years is easing down, but the situation is still fragile and there still is mass unemployment amongst young people is. The greatest risk the EU can take is to simply go back to 'business as usual'. The old paradigms were the core reason for the economic crisis and the deteriorating relation between the EU institutions, its political direction and the inhabitants of the EU member states.

The ECPM does not pretend to offer a solution for every aspect of the crisis we try to overcome. Our goal is to offer a new paradigm as a direction for the development of the European Union.

The fundament of this paradigm is the realistic view that the human being is relational. In its biological existence, its ecological dependence and economic interdependence, life is relational. Our relational vision is a balance between individuality on the one hand and culture and environment on the other. It is neither collectivist nor individualist.

This is as well the Christian understanding of human dignity that affirms the value of every human being from the beginning and in every phase of its existence, a value that can only be understood in relation with each other. If we understand how valuable the other person is, we can understand the value of life and the need to see and live life relationally. This understanding has shaped the history of Europe and is the foundation of the values we cherish today. All fundamental rights and freedoms are based on the Christian understanding of the preciousness of every individual.

We need a renewed understanding and emphasis on these Christian-relational notions in order to overcome the current crisis. In our understanding, the root of this crisis is individualism in which individual freedom has been separated from the relation with other people and society, and in which the human being is understood as an autonomous individual. This type of individualism has allowed greed to become a major cause for our economic crisis. Individualism is the root of many social problems we face today. The weakening situation of the family, the fracturing of society and the

decreasing solidarity are essentially rooted in this type of individualism. This social situation is a major source of distrust in the European institutions.

Another consequence of this emphasis on autonomous individualism is the commodification of life. There is a development in which weaker and vulnerable life (beginning and ending) becomes subordinated to the stronger stages of life. Currently, the choice of the autonomous individual is often seen as the highest principle and other values like responsibility and mutual care are put under pressure.

The commodification of life is not only seen in medical-ethical debates. It is present in all situations in which the strong use and take advantage of the weak. Human trafficking as modern-day slavery is a real problem in Europe. In our economy we see that those who have a weaker position struggle to maintain a decent level of living. Too often people are seen as a means to an end. Poverty and the number of 'working poor' has reached unprecedented level in post-war Europe.

A Christian-relational approach is necessary to counter these consequences and excesses of autonomous individualism and to provide a balanced view on humanity and society. A view that includes the relational and emotional dimensions of life which are more complete than the current autonomous perception of the human being.

This has far-reaching implications for the EU and its policies. Many policies today are based on the perception of the human being as an autonomous individual who will make rational decisions and strive for efficiency. This view is implicitly reflected in many EU policies which are often only measured for their economic efficiency and outcome. This one-sided focus together with the one-sided approach to economy has enforced a disempowered and disconnected feeling. It is clear that a change of direction is necessary.

Subsidiarity

A reevaluation of subsidiarity based on the relational paradigm is necessary. Subsidiarity means that political decisions and their execution should, in principle, take place at the level to which people relate to and therefore feel empowered towards the decision-making process. Due to the lack of subsidiarity many feel unrelated and therefore disempowered. We need an EU that understands this and tries to build the relation with the people in the EU. This means an EU without the federalist dream of an 'ever closer union'. Rather an EU that will refocus with more energy at the decisions and tasks that need to be done at this level.

Our relational understanding also includes the cultural dimension. Any person is related to and shaped by the surrounding culture. Even though culture is not a nationalist one-dimensional concept, it is a reality that has tremendous effect on politics and policies. It is a reality that has not been given sufficient weight in EU policy making due to the limited individualist understanding of the human being. As a consequence the EU has been on a crash course with economic and political realities in the member states in the last few years. This has been most visible in the euro crisis, a crisis partly caused by failing to understand cultural differences.

We advocate an EU that takes the relational reality of life and society into account in all its policies. This will open the door to an EU that facilitates more and regulates less. It means that a door needs to be opened towards an EU that will allow more diversity in more policy fields than it currently does.

We as ECPM believe that the relational reality of life means that we cannot separate people from their history and cultural backgrounds. It is therefore not really possible to implement 'one size fits all' solutions across Europe. The idea that this was possible, regardless of our cultural diversity, was one of the major reasons for the crisis that hit the foundation of the euro.

The ECPM will present a number of ideas based on our paradigm. In this we will focus on human dignity for all, an inclusive European economy, recognition of family life, freedom of religion, belief and conscience and combating human trafficking.

The goal of these proposals is to improve the EU and stimulate the debate in its direction. We will challenge the existing status quo but we will not accept the label 'Eurosceptic' to describe this challenge. We believe a mature debate on the fundamentals of the EU is possible without aiming to dismantle the EU. We challenge the larger European parties to be open to new ideas without labelling them as 'Eurosceptic' and we challenge those parties who question the existence of the EU to present constructive alternatives.

We will promote this vision in the coming European elections and in the following years. We invite the people of Europe to be part of this process.

1. For a Europe of Human Dignity

Principles of human dignity transcend time and culture. Cultural values related to human dignity represent some of the most significant aspects of contemporary societies throughout Europe and internationally. Human dignity has increasingly become a phrase associated with values across various spectrums. However, human dignity is not only a value, it is not a belief, and it is not an opinion. Rather, human dignity is a principle and transcends the subjective and presents a reality of critical importance to each one of us. As a principle, human dignity is, therefore, unchangeable and relevant in all cultures at all times. In Europe, the principle of human dignity is inscribed in the first article of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU: „Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected”.

Human dignity expresses the intrinsic value of every human being. In Christianity, this universal principle rests on the human being as created in the image and likeness of God. Created in His image and likeness defines the human being as a relational being. The Christian understanding of God is Trinitarian and therefore relational which means that this is reflected in human existence. Politically this means that human dignity is not just about the value and rights of the individual. Human dignity is not fully realized as long as the value of committed relations is not appreciated and cherished. Human dignity includes valuing relations and striving towards the right and just relations in life ethics, society and economy.

The intrinsic value of the human being includes every stage of human existence. Excluding the beginning or the end of human life from treatment as human, undermines fundamentally the intrinsic value of the human being and is therefore a violation of human dignity. We cannot exclude any stage of human life from human dignity. There is a particular need to protect vulnerable, handicapped, or unborn members of the Human Family.

Valuing life

Issues touching life ethics have since long been part of the EU agenda. Especially in the fields of research and foreign aid. The EU is a major donor to research projects in many fields, including ‘life studies’ that may raise bio-ethical questions. The EU is as well an important supporter of foreign aid and in this way involved in questions around reproductive ethics.

Respect for Human Dignity in the field of Biomedical research requires universal acceptance of the principle that Science must serve Humanity rather than Humanity serve Science. Human life, in whatever form, whatever its appearance or capacity, has inherent and indisputable dignity. Basic biological principles irrefutably show that from the moment of conception or creation the embryo inside or outside the womb is a unique human being with a unique genetic code.

The debate around the report ‘on sexual and reproductive health and rights’ that was tabled by MEP Edite Estrela has made clear that a number of NGO’s and allied MEP’s push for abortion to be included in EU policies. The huge wave of protest from citizens from all member-states lead to the rejection of this report. The high profile of the debate made many people aware that this is playing at EU level. The so-called ‘Estrela report’ seems to be a reaction on the success of the European Citizens’ Initiative ‘One of Us’ that received support from 1,8 million citizens in the EU.

The ECPM welcomes the statements from the European Commission in which it was clearly expressed that abortion is an issue of the member-states and not an issue for EU policies. In addition,

the ECPM recalls that the European Court of Justice has ruled (Brüstle vs. Greenpeace) that a human embryo represents the beginning in the development of a human being.

Following this, and based on the described principles of human dignity, the ECPM calls on the next European Commission to end the financing of activities that presuppose the destruction of human embryos, in particular in the areas of research, development aid and public health.

The ECPM opposes any move towards the inclusion of abortion in EU policies. The ECPM expects from the Commission to continue their clear stance on this issue. The ECPM consequently calls on the Commission to end EU funding that supports the promotion of abortion as part of reproductive health and rights.

The crisis of human dignity

Pope Francis made in the exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" a clear link between the economic crisis and human dignity. In many ways the crisis has revealed unjust economic relations and has in the process undermined human dignity. An economy of exclusion is violating human dignity.

The millions of Europeans that lost their jobs and the many more that felt disempowered, have experienced this in their own lives. The growing poverty in Europe and increasing gap between the rich and the poor is in essence a crisis in human dignity that needs to be addressed as such.

This is not only a European issue. It should be a global priority to fight the enormous injustice that people experience and has effect on even their most basic needs. Even institutions as the World Economic Forum have pointed to economic inequality as a major global problem. In a time in which wages fell substantially, the super-rich only increased their wealth.

The ECPM will therefore set out an agenda towards an inclusive economy based on just economic relations. In our opinion this is the only long-term answer to this crisis. There is a need to end the situation in which the marketplace and financial speculation seem autonomous and separated from society while attacking human dignity. We need an economy that works for the people and advances the dignity of every human being.

For this reason the ECPM supports the 'Pledge for a work-free Sunday and decent work' as laid down by the European Sunday Alliance:

To ensure that all relevant EU-legislation both respects and promotes the protection of a common weekly day of rest for all EU citizens, which shall be in principle on a Sunday, in order to protect workers' health and promote a better balance between family and private life and work;

To promote EU-legislation guaranteeing sustainable working time patterns based on the principle of decent work benefiting society as well as the economy as a whole.¹

Governments are in essence not meant to run economies but can support changes in the right direction. This includes the EU governmental institutions. However, even more than renewal of policies, there is a need to see the people behind the numbers as more important than economic figures. This will reflect an awareness of the Dignity and intrinsic value of every human being.

¹ <http://www.europeansundayalliance.eu/site/euelections2014thepledge>

2. For an Economy that Works for People

The worst of the economic crisis that plagued the economies of Europe since 2008 seems to have passed. In some countries there are even some signs of job growth. This is a welcome situation for those who can now find again a job. At the same time businesses and families are still struggling to pay off excess debts as public debts are at post-war highs in almost every EU Member State and cheap ECB money is necessary to keep many banks afloat. In the global economy the emerging economies, whose growth helped European exporters through the crisis, are now showing signs of stagnation.

This shows the fragility of the current design of our economic system. The crisis has demonstrated the major flaws which have to be dealt with in order to prevent a repetition. Simply continuing with the current system without addressing fundamental issues is not an option. The fundamental questions of poverty (and working poor), ownership, ecology, energy, ageing and resources cannot be ignored due to the simple fact that if these issues are not dealt with they will become the cause for a deeper crisis.

Towards a new economic paradigm

For this reason the relational paradigm has to be applied to our economy. Economy is in essence about life. In our view the purpose of all economic activities is to support life and advance the wellbeing for all. Economy is meant to provide sufficient means for all people, to support family life, to let people flourish with their creative talents and to find solutions for the problems we face².

This view leads to the conclusion that economy is not just about efficiency and competitiveness leading to a profit regardless of the socio-cultural context. Economy cannot be seen separated from culture, history and religion. The reverse is also true; our culture, convictions and history shape our economies³. A process which demonstrates that our economy is a relational process.

However, at the moment, the one-dimensional view of the economy as a system of mere production and consumption, is still dominant regardless of its unsustainability in both economic and ecological terms. The dominant factor in this current view is capital which is seen as the most important input and result of the economic process. Seeing capital as the most dominant factor has resulted into an economic system in which capital markets do not only dominate the whole economic process but even become a threat to the real economy. A recent research report from McKinsey shows how the focus on profit for short-term shareholder value is toxic to the real economy of real people, real companies, real production and real services⁴. Worse even, the speculation on food prices has apparently lead to hunger and severe social problems in the global south.

The dominance of capital markets has even put democracy itself in jeopardy. In the last few years we have seen big investment funds and impersonal international bodies overriding the democratic process. In this way the decrease of economic 'ownership' has been translated into a situation in which people feel that their democratic influence has gone as well.

An important underlying cause of the economic crisis was the culture of excessive greed in the world of capital markets. This was partly possible due to the autonomy of these markets over the real economy, leading to a mere focus on money disconnected from its effects on real people. This

² See also 'After Capitalism, rethinking economic relationships', Jubilee Campaign & ECPF, 2012

³ See also 'The Economics of Good and Evil', by Tomáš Sedláček, 2009

⁴ http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/leading_in_the_21st_century/focusing_capital_on_the_long_term

culture is at the same time embedded in the idea that people are no more than producers and consumers who have to satisfy their desires. The latter becoming more and more indebted and disowned.

This situation raises two fundamental questions. It raises the question of values and the question of ownership in our economy. If competition and efficiency are the only values in economic policies then we will create an economy which ignores all other equally important values like trust, responsibility and reciprocity. It also puts fundamental values for a society under pressure like generosity and mutual care. A limited scope of values will therefore lead to the exclusion of important aspects of life and society and as a consequence lead to the exclusion of people.

This is indeed the case in the crisis that hit Europe. It is demonstrated in the described effects on democracy. We can see it even clearer in our economy. Unemployment has risen to unprecedented levels, especially among young people. According to the European Commission there has been a sharp rise of poverty in the EU. The traditional answer 'more jobs' to escape poverty is not sufficient in the face of a rise in the number of 'working poor'. The 2013 Employment Development in Europe review found that only half of the poor who take a job are able to escape poverty. The explosion of unemployment is clearly connected to the massive bankruptcy of small and medium sized enterprises (SME's) and massive lay-offs by multinationals. Both causes of this mass unemployment point to the need for a new and more inclusive direction of our economy.

What is needed therefore is a renewed emphasis on values and relations in our economic thinking and policies. It is now time for a system that offers no reward without responsibility, no investment without involvement and no profit without participation.

It is time for a relational paradigm that leads to a more inclusive approach in which the dignity of the human being, our common wellbeing and wise stewardship of resources is seen as equally important as competitiveness and efficiency. This approach can guide the EU as well as national governments in their economic policies.

Guidelines for EU policies

Based on the outlined idea of relational values in economic policies, policy making has to be done as closely connected to the people as possible. This narrows the scope of the EU policy making to issues that are currently dealt with at EU level. In its economic policies the EU can nevertheless place new goals and benchmarks that define economic success.

A major bench-mark change is to redefine growth beyond mere GDP terms. Growth has to become more than Purchasing Managers Indexes (PMI). Growth in this scenario has to be defined in the first place in inclusive terms. Economic growth is only present if there is rise in employment and decrease in poverty, including a decrease in the number of working poor. Inclusive growth can furthermore include the situation of SME's as a prime indication of sustainable and long-term improvement of our economy. One crucial growth marker is the decrease of economic pressure on families. We have to drive the EU economy towards a goal: HDi (Human Development indicator)⁵ of EU countries should be in the top 35 countries (some EU Countries as Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria are in a lower position than Belarus, for instance, beyond the 50th place).

⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi> United Nations explain clearly what and how HDI works.

Another growth indicator is the rise in ownership and the decrease of private debt. Inclusive growth includes the extent of ecological pressure. The ecological costs cannot be passed to future generations. Therefore the EU should work to a 'circular economy' as recommended by the World Economic Forum in order to have a sustainable approach towards the usage of resources.

An important new goal for EU economic policies is to strive for real diversification in our economy and in the financing models of companies and other business models. A high degree of diversity will create a more sustainable economy, especially when this is accompanied by more diversity of financing. This will make our economy less depending on a few types of financing as it is the case at the moment. Sharing the best practices and bending the regulation to that goal can be important EU policy instruments. A culture of social responsibility in the capital markets can be stimulated, showing to the clients that they should choose firms with social responsibility and sustainability.

Encouraging inclusive growth and renewal of business life

In working towards a more relational economy it is crucial that there is a clear preference at EU level for all types of companies that are focused on stakeholder value. This policy preference should include the following non-exhaustive list of business models: SME's, co-operations, social enterprises and forms of shared ownership by employees. It also includes those companies who take social corporate responsibility seriously as an investment.

A facilitating EU means in this specific field that the EU will develop a way that will lead to an exchange of the best practices in inclusive business types. EU subsidies in the economic sphere can be directed towards an increase in inclusive business types in the EU. The EU can further encourage inclusive growth with a preference for local and regional SME's because they create long-term employment in a region. These preferences can be expressed in the rules for tendering

The ECPM questions with this proposal the emphasis on competition as expression of the idea of traditional free market principles applied to all spheres of economic and public life. It is time that the idea of the free market is completed with important fundamentals of our economic life like ecological sustainability and inclusive economic growth. It is as well time to question the expansion of the market to all types of public services. The EU should end its involvement in this regard and leave it to the member states to decide whether public services should be privatised or not. Especially in crucial important fields like healthcare, all EU pressure for more privatisation has to end.

At the same time the ECPM believes that undue state support for (most of the time big) companies is not compatible with an EU of free exchange of goods and services. Fair competition together with the notions of inclusive growth will lead to more innovation. Innovation in turn is a crucial engine for future economic progress and social improvements. Innovation is especially important to find answers to crucial and pressing ecological questions. More green technologies in transport can be a major step forward to improve our economy, ecology and societies.

Energy

Green technologies are ever more important in EU energy policies. The ECPM applauds ambitious EU-wide green targets and national initiatives such as the German 'Energiewende', even though negative side-effects such as an increase in the use of coal for energy generation have to be tackled. We have seen an enormous increase in regional and local green energy co-operations in the last decade. Improving the grid at local level to facilitate further growth of private and shared green energy generation can further encourage a development that will make the EU less dependent on

imported fossil fuels. At the same time the EU has to improve the energy grid at European level, in order to protect in particular the Eastern EU Member States from Russian power games. A sharp rise of energy costs must be avoided in order to enable a normal continuation of the economy.

At the same time these technologies have to be developed in a way that they will become less depending on rare earth metals, making them less dependent on Chinese export policies.

Agriculture

The same preference can be applied in the Common Agricultural Policy. In this field co-operation can be encouraged as an alternative to expansion, and green innovations can be encouraged. The direct payments (first pillar of CAP) should be better targeted on social objectives and sustainability needs. Second pillar policies should complement this and support the provision of green public services (preserving nature and respecting the relation with creation). Continuing and improving co-operatives, producer groups and interbranche organisations is a proven way to ensure food security, market transparency and fair remuneration for Europe. It is also a way to strengthen the position of farmers in the chain of agricultural industries.

Trade

Inclusive growth cannot be limited to the EU if it is to be truly inclusive. Due to the lack of progress in trade liberalization at the World Trade Organization (WTO), the EU is negotiating an increasing number of trade agreements with countries and regions all over the world. For these trade agreements to provide real value for people on both sides of the agreement, they will need serious fair trade. Fair trade includes furthering a level playing field, but is also addressing the so-called non trade concerns. The ECPM wants strong chapters on human rights and sustainable development, subject to the standard mechanisms for dispute settlement, as a minimum demand for consent to any trade agreement. Furthermore, in case of agreements with developing countries they can be accompanied by a process of exchange of green technology innovations.

The future of the euro

Temporal reductions of debts, primary budget surpluses and fragile economic growth cannot hide or take away the fact that a number of economies in the Eurozone cannot converge⁶. The cultural and connected economic differences can no longer be ignored. The policy with regard to the euro has to become far less ideological and much more practical. The ECPM does not back the idea that the EU and the Eurozone should become identical in the long run.

Before a new crisis will emerge an honest debate is necessary to determine which Eurozone economies have long-term potential to converge. For those economies who did not have these prospects a new path to prosperity has to be designed. In order to keep the EU democracy and economy sustainable and to avoid a repetition of the grim human costs, a slow and careful reset of the Eurozone is necessary.

⁶ See also ECPF publication: 'the future of the Euro' <http://www.ecpf.info/thefutureoftheeuro>

3. Priority for Family and Marriage

ECPM recognizes the family as the most important social entity in the world, it precedes the state and any other community or group. Life starts in the family and relations start in the family. The natural family is a micro-society where elementary skills and experiences are being conveyed. Healthy families lead to a healthy society while fragmented families do the opposite.

The ECPM wants the European Union to respect the sovereignty of the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, and recognize its inherent rights that are inalienable. The family is not a mere collection of individuals and therefore legislation based solely on the individual will eventually collide with the rights of the family.

The future of Europe

Any vision on the future of the European Union and the Member States should include a view on how to promote healthy families whereas they:

- Are the starting point for forming human assets
- Accompany life from the beginning until the natural end
- Create the social space where children gain confidence, establish relations and grow up into responsible adults
- Give care to infants, children and the elderly and by doing so strengthen solidarity in society while saving state expenditure on, for example, medical and physiological care

Investing in children is investing in the future, as they will grow up to become the most important resource. Parents who invest in their children therefore invest in society as a whole. Parents should not be economically “punished” for taking responsibility to raise their children.

Without any doubt, the view on family and marriage is one of the most important and influential political issues. Many religious, cultural, historical and economical aspects are involved in creating a view. ECPM believes that any form of policy on family should therefore be the responsibility of the Member States and the EU should respect subsidiarity, especially regarding this subject.

Balancing care & work

The family is a caring unity. People, as relational beings, need this environment before they need career, possessions and wealth. At the same time it is clear that the family needs a sound economy to be able to support family life.

The majority of the families in Europe are struggling to find some balance between paid work and family life. To complicate matters, in Western Europe unpaid work is much undervalued at the expense of family life. We advocate therefore that policy makers will see the intrinsic and economical value of care for one’s home and children. In EU economic policies however an economic view is dominant before the freedom and intrinsic value of the family. Two full-time working parents are seen as a general goal in order to sustain the economy.

It is important that care and work can be balanced. In our view the economy has to be balanced towards the family and not just the family towards the economic processes. Without the view that the economy has to serve families, soon family life becomes subordinated to economic processes. In recent years we have seen too often that measures to repair the economic crisis have caused

economic hardship for families. At the same time (extended) family life has been the reason why people were able to carry on throughout the crisis.

EU policy makers can consider the effects of the EU economic policies without interfering in the family policies of the member states. The ECPM does not call for EU measures for families but rather for a change of attitude among policy makers in this regard.

Labour migration

The EU should facilitate the Member States only in considering issues that are crossing borders. The most important item is the social consequences of labour migration. The internal market has brought many blessings to the European continent but it has also put families under pressure. Hundreds of thousands of migration workers temporarily work and live in a different country than their families. Especially, in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria this phenomenon is imminent. Whereas there is a clear economic benefit for the man or woman to work abroad - earning a better salary in order to sustain the family economically - , it does have serious negative consequences for the family that is still in the country of origin.

The root of this problem is the extreme focus on economic participation and job emancipation for women. The extreme focus on the economy instead of on the well-being of people has led to one-sided policies in EU and Member State legislation. This mistake needs to be corrected.

4. Freedom of Faith, Conscience and Expression

Faith, conscience and expression are relational and fundamental freedoms. These freedoms mean that we do not just make our own conviction heard but that we give each other the space to do the same, individually and together. Real freedom of faith, conscience and expression only becomes visible via relations with those who feel, think or act differently. Mutual respect for these freedoms will lead to real plurality.

The European Union is, besides a project for peace and prosperity, also a promoter of plurality. In the year 2000 the EU motto “United in Diversity” was adopted. ECPM wholly supports this motto since only a real understanding of each other’s culture and history can lead to a beneficial cooperation on the long term.

Foundations

The basis for the view of the ECPM on freedom of faith, conscience and expression is derived from Article 18 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (The United Nations Assembly, Paris, 1948) which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Furthermore the ECPM fully supports and endorses the *Global Charter of Conscience* which is summarized in five points:

- 1. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is a precious, fundamental, and inalienable human right – the right to adopt, hold, freely exercise, share, or change one’s beliefs, subject solely to the dictates of conscience and independent of all outside, especially governmental control.*
- 2. This right is inherent in humanity and rooted in the inviolable dignity of each human individual. As a birth right of belonging, it protects our freedom to be human and is the equal right of all human beings without exception.*
- 3. The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion contains a duty as well as a right, because a right for one person is automatically a right for another and a responsibility for both.*
- 4. The public place of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is best fulfilled through cultivating civility between citizens and constructing a cosmopolitan and civil public square – a public square in which people of all faiths, religious and naturalistic, are free to enter and engage public life on the basis of their faith.*
- 5. The rights of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion apply not only to individuals, but to individuals in community with others, associating on the basis of faith.⁷*

Anti-discrimination

Without any doubt, discrimination is damaging for the society and individuals and it should be addressed in a proper way. However, anti-discrimination laws and policies can create a serious risk of

⁷ Global charter of Conscience http://charterofconscience.org/?page_id=40

enforcing a form of political correctness that, when applied, put equal fundamental rights and freedoms under pressure.

Anti-discrimination policies can, therefore, become a serious risk to the freedom of religious associations. These organizations only exist with the aim to advance their faith, fellowship, and similar activities. The right to promote these efforts and beliefs is guaranteed in international law as a fundamental right and a cornerstone for democracy. ECPM believes that national states and the EU should be impartial in assessing the legitimacy of religious beliefs and should require conflicting groups to tolerate each other. In some member states, religious organizations and faith-based associations have been shut down because of anti-discrimination legislation (like the Roman Catholic foster care agencies in the UK). The ECPM therefore calls for caution with regard to the Equal Treatment Directives in order to prevent such unintended consequences of EU policy.

It is the view of ECPM that faith inspires many EU citizens to actively engage in society for the benefit of society as a whole. Religious followers are often active in numerous local, regional or national activities addressing issues such as poverty, care and reconciliation. The plurality of religious and ideological worldviews in the EU should be respected instead of rejected in favour of one particular religion or ideology.

The assertion and promotion of equal freedom of all convictions and mutual dialogue are in our view the best way to combat discrimination.

Freedom to disagree

Freedom that only protects ideas that are accepted by the majority is not real freedom. Yet, there is a growing tendency in European institutions to promote the freedom of one group at the costs of the freedom of another group. There is less and less freedom to disagree with the views of a vocal political majority. Yet, the European Court of Human Rights has interpreted freedom of expression to protect not only the information or ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also those that offend, shock or disturb. The latter are the true demands of pluralism, broad-mindedness and tolerance. If there is no fundamental right to disagree there is no democratic society.⁸

ECPM believes that real pluralism requires the space for a group, religion or ideology to question the views of another group, religion or ideology at any time. In order to create a genuine debate at the national and European level, there should be room for all views in society.

In the EU there should be a level playing field in this regard, especially when it comes to funding of NGO's by the EU. The ECPM wants a thorough review of this funding and asks for more transparency. NGO's who have an ideological or industry related interest in EU policy making should in principle not receive direct funding from the EU.

ECPM wants a European Union that we *can* relate to, a European Union that respects cultural, historical and religious differences and promotes a genuinely open debate and the freedom to disagree for all.

⁸ Roger Kiska, "The threat to religious liberties and the European institutions" in ECPM publication *Liberty of faith and conscience*, Sfera politiciii (June 2011): 3 - 12

Parental rights

ECPM believes that it is up to the parents to decide in which way they want to raise their children. The influence of national governments in this should be limited while the European Union itself should fully respect the principle of subsidiarity, especially regarding this issue.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that among the most important rights of the child, besides the right to life, are precisely the right to parental love and the right to education. The Convention also explicitly states that parents, being the ones who love their children the most, are the ones called upon to decide about the education of their children. Furthermore, Article 2 of the First Protocol of the European Convention of Human Rights explicitly specifies that the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious convictions.⁹

ECPM fully supports these Articles and wants the European Union to respect the rights of the parents in every EU member state. The EU institutions should refrain from any interference in this area. A coincidental political majority of MEP's in the European Parliament cannot decide over something as personal as the raising of children.

Freedom of faith and protection of converts in EU policies

Freedom of belief is a clear indicator of the level of democracy and freedom in a country. It is no coincidence that the countries in which Christians are persecuted the most, are either authoritarian regimes or failed states that are facing a certain level of civil war. In many so-called more well-ordered societies there is in practice no real freedom of belief as well.

According to *Open Doors* over 100 million Christians worldwide are currently persecuted or in danger because of their belief. The number of persecuted people of other faiths is lower, however persecution on this ground is always an act against human dignity.

The ECPM welcomes therefore the adoption of the guidelines to promote freedom of belief in EU foreign policy. These guidelines are a practical demonstration of freedom of faith as core value of the EU. ECPM MEP's have been in the forefront of the development of these guidelines.

The ECPM MEP's have in this regard put special emphasis on the right of each person to change his/her belief (or refrain from any belief). This right is the cornerstone of freedom of faith. Without this right there is no real freedom of religion and belief.

However, also within the EU there is a trend of converts that are being threatened because they changed their belief. This is especially the case with migrants and asylum seekers coming to the EU. Given this background, the ECPM wants the European Union to address this issue in the coming years and facilitate solutions for the member states.

⁹ Kiska, 3 - 12

5. Human Trafficking; Fighting modern-day Slavery

Trafficking is an ultimate de-humanizing act that reduces people to goods. It distorts relations and severely hurts people to re-establish new healthy relationships. Christian NGO's have been leading the fight against this modern-day slavery and for the ECPM this is an issue that has to be high on the agenda of the EU.

Approximately 20.9 million people are in forced labour worldwide. Although it is difficult to establish an exact figure, conservative estimates suggest 44 per cent of these people have been trafficked¹⁰. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is the most common worldwide - 58 per cent of all identified victims are victim of sexual exploitation and forced into prostitution.

Cooperation at EU an international level

Since human trafficking is a cross-border crime, combating it requires international cooperation. ECPM draws the attention of the EP to the positive results achieved by joined non-legislative efforts such as close cooperation with professionals and the civil society organisations active in the field and partnership-building with the private sector which should continue to be strengthened. A business coalition involving companies wishing to keep their supply chains free of goods made by victims of human trafficking is to be welcomed and encouraged through incentive policies at EU level (e.g. reduced taxes). The EU Member States must continue sharing best practices as well as working and establishing stronger cooperation with all the stakeholders in order to better identify, protect and assist victims, including in the legislative process, from being subjected to violence and exploitation.

Prevent and reduce the demand

The best solution, proven to effectively address¹¹ and have positive effects on reducing the demand for sexual services, is to encourage at EU level that member states will criminalise the purchase of sex in all circumstances as well as third party sellers (consisting of pimps and traffickers) and decriminalise those personally selling sex, such as the Nordic Model¹².

Give special attention to children

The EU is under an obligation to make a commitment to do everything in its power to stop child trafficking and to ensure children receive protection and justice.

This commitment must start with eradicating internet child pornography as well as fixing flaws in the children welfare system. We urge the EU to build a technology task force and put in place technology innovation to fight child sexual exploitation. Data systems that track and find missing children, who should be regarded as victims and not runaways, must also be improved at EU level. ECPM is also calling on the member states to introduce a system which would provide every child victim a child trafficking guardian to support them and speak up for their best interests. A guardian who offers security and stability to a child is invaluable in aiding his/her recovery and preventing the child from returning to his trafficker.

¹⁰ International Labour Organisation Global Estimate of Forced Labour 2012

¹¹ Seo-Young Cho, *Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking?*, German Institute for Economic Research-DIW Berlin, Germany, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

¹² <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/european-parliament-vote-nordic-model-prostitution-that-fines-clients-1433466#.Uuipg3B1E7Q.facebook>

Policies to counter cybercrime connected to trafficking

Most young people who are exploited sexually in return for payment came into contact with the purchaser via the Internet¹³. It is difficult for the sex services provided online to fall under the definition of sex trafficking because it is hard to prove the three main elements: “force, fraud or, coercion.” Therefore, measures at EU level to adjust the human trafficking legislation to online sex services, as well as programs to raise awareness and prevent people from being offered online jobs in prostitution must be adopted.

Protect, support and assist the victims

The EU common policy must adopt a victim-focus approach by ensuring services are available to help them get out of the sex industry. Therefore, EU common guidelines to better identify victims of trafficking must be developed. Further, Member States should provide proper designation to ensure victims receive the care and the help they need, and link up the national referral mechanisms and the relevant authorities: the police, migration services, border guard services, judges, social fraud investigators and also experts on financial investigations.

For the purpose of better protecting young persons against sexual abuse member states can be encouraged to ensure that persons up to the age of 21 have special status where a trafficking offense has been committed and stand under special protection. The EU can facilitate a process in which families are given assistance to reunite with those European citizens who are victims of human trafficking in another EU Member State. A victim-centred approach also couples assistance in starting their new life either in the country they were trafficked or their home country (see Italy’s model). So they are guaranteed a residence permit and receive education and training to help them start a new career. This is really what every European Union country should be striving for.

¹³ Swedish Government report, pg 35, <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/14/92/31/96b1e019.pdf>