

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>