

Statement on the European Union

By the General Assembly of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

The informal EU summit in Bratislava on 16 September was the first occasion after the UK referendum for the 27 Heads of State and Government of the European Union to meet without the UK prime minister. The outcome was the adoption of the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap. The latter contains a number of concrete policy proposals and a timetable for their implementation in the areas of migration, internal and external security, defence, economic and social development and youth. A few days earlier in his speech on the state of the European Union Jean Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, came out with his five point roadmap for investment, the digital single market, security, defence and youth.

Taking note of these initiatives but also of the continued controversy and disagreement among member states after the Brexit vote, the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) gathered on Monday, the 3rd October, in Luxembourg for its annual General Assembly and adopted the following declaration:

1. The European Union is in bad shape. One important member state has decided to leave the European Union. Many others openly ignore or defy rules and decisions previously adopted together. Some are themselves struggling with unity. To bring things together again trust above all needs to be restored. Trust among member states and, clearly, the trust of citizens in politics in general and in the European institutions in particular. Trust in the European Union as still a valid response to the terrifying war and violence of the 20th century and to the challenges of globalisation in the 21st.
2. Trust in Europe will not result from declarations, roadmaps and speeches and certainly not in the short term. It will take years to rebuild what was lost and it will need substantial results in terms of quality jobs for young people, new opportunities for the poorest, more security for all and protection of the environment. It will require more transparent and democratic procedures. It will necessitate more respect for national, regional and local traditions, which are threatened by global market forces, and more social justice in terms of taxation and opportunities for the poorest in Europe and worldwide.
3. The European Union brings together democratic nation states. It does not replace them and its survival depends on stable and clear majorities in favour of the EU within them. Having this in mind, the next twelve months will present a number of electoral challenges. Several elections and referenda may further weaken popular support for the EU. Governments are usually less inclined to take bold political steps just before important elections. Therefore the months ahead are also very much the time for civil society to take the lead and promote the European Union. Christian Churches will play their part in this.
4. Thus, we welcome the process of consultation between the Conference of European Churches and its membership leading to the next CEC General Assembly in 2018, which

was launched last June. Over the next twelve months the Catholic bishops of the EU countries (COMECE) will actively prepare for their major Congress on the future of Europe in Rome 2017. National initiatives like the *Semaines Sociales de France* will devote their annual gathering in 2017 to the European question. Furthermore, we thank Pope Francis for his committed interest in Europe and for the powerful speeches he gave in 2015 in the European Parliament and at the conferral of the *Charlemagne Prize* in 2016.

5. Justice and Peace Europe, our own network, is devoted to peace and social justice in the world and we have decided to call our next annual concerted action “*Europe at the Crossroads*”. The guiding document for the concerted action will be published at the beginning of Lent 2017 and it will include ten concrete policy proposals. National commissions will initiate local activities on the basis of the document and the proposals.

6. Meanwhile, we wish to state our strong commitment to the European Union. We hope that the peoples and nations of our continent continue the path of close cooperation and overcome the current difficulties. Gloomy prophecies often predict the economic and demographic decline of Europe in the course of the 21st century. A possible break up of the European Union would certainly accelerate this process. Improving the European Union and bringing it ever closer to its citizens are the best way to prevent it. Christianity is not a religion of decline but is uplifting. It is a religion of hope. As Christians in Europe we therefore appeal to our fellow citizens and especially those who hold political responsibilities to contribute to a Europe of responsibility and solidarity.

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) is the alliance of 31 Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe, working for the promotion of justice, peace and respect for human dignity. Justice and Peace Europe contributes to raising awareness of the Catholic social doctrine in the European societies and the European institutions. Its General Secretariat is based in Brussels.

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