



POLITICAL PROGRAM

2024- 2029



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the European Union has experienced a dynamic and transformative period marked by significant economic, social, and political developments. As we reflect upon this period, it becomes evident that the European Union has been shaped by both challenges and opportunities, with its member states navigating various crises, implementing reforms, and striving for greater unity.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought about an unprecedented economic shock, testing the resilience and solidarity of the Union. As Member States confronted the immense health and economic challenges, the EU took bold steps to mitigate the impact, establishing a comprehensive recovery plan and reinforcing the importance of cooperation and cohesion. In some respects, we could argue that the efforts to contain the spread went too far, leaving people frustrated and isolated. We are all still learning lessons from the pandemic and making sense of what happened in order to be better equipped in dealing with the next crisis.

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine added significantly to the strain Europe was feeling by causing a major displacement of people within Europe and by challenging the security in the region. The sanctions imposed by the European Union, although necessary, ended up triggering an energy crisis and high inflation.

These developments compounded the already existing issues in the European societies. Huge differences in employment, wealth and gross domestic product persist between the Northern/ Western Member States and the Southern/Eastern Europe ones. A mountain of debt still looms over Europe's economies and our wealth remains connected to and dependent on undemocratic governments. The constant pursuit for economic growth oftentimes comes at the cost of the environment around us. We are proposing ways European businesses can develop and thrive while using resources in a sustainable way because we believe caring for this planet is a God-given mandate.

In many European countries, our members continue to face pushback from extremist forces which challenge traditional social norms and the foundations of our society. On the other hand, there is a rise in extreme right-wing ideology deeply incompatible with the Christian view of human dignity and of a relational society.

In this 2024-2029 political programme, ECPM presents its core beliefs and its vision on how to face the current EU challenges so that we make the European Union a better, safer place. With each European election, the ECPM wishes to highlight and promote the spearheads presented in this program, which we believe represent sensible and practical answers to Europe's challenges.

ECPM recognizes the European Union as a political and social reality and we have a constructive, but critical, approach to the current shape of the EU. In many cases, the level of involvement from the EU institutions needs to be reduced. We advocate for a strict adherence to the principle of subsidiarity and for clear reforms outlining the areas where EU institutions and regulations are still needed. In this document, clear distinctions are made between national and European competences. We are a forward-looking party, and we acknowledge that we live in an interconnected world where the EU is simply necessary. We appreciate the EU's role in maintaining stability and security in Europe and we honour the Christian roots it was founded upon.

The ECPM members all agree on the core issues presented in this document. This is our strength- that we are united and can work together on the fundamental values we share, regardless of differences on smaller, singular issues. We look hopeful toward the future, and we work together for a Europe in which every voice is elevated and heard, empowered with tools, information and resources so that we can successfully engage with our community and society and create the world we dream of for the next generations. When you vote for ECPM candidates you can have faith in your vote!

HUMAN DIGNITY

Summary

- Human dignity- defined as the intrinsic value of every human being created by God- is the cornerstone of all human rights and of our values presented herein.
- ECPM defends the right to life from conception until natural death.
- We align ourselves with the principles stated in the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine and recognize that it is the sole competence of EU Member States to legislate on bio-ethics and healthcare matters.
- We stand firmly against all forms of surrogacy.
- We defend the right to life of babies diagnosed with genetic diseases and wholly support the worth and dignity of people living with disabilities.
- ECPM advocates for aging with dignity and in the midst of a healthy community. We choose palliative care as the only dignified and humane option for the end of life.

Human dignity refers to the intrinsic value of every human being, it is the cornerstone of all human rights. We believe this universal principle rests on the human being created in the image and likeness of God. 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 merely about the value and rights of the individual, but about individuals in relationship with each other. Human dignity includes creating right and just relationships in life ethics, society and economy. We believe that human dignity is foremost a responsibility: to love God and love your neighbours, and to protect people - especially the weak and the fragile.

The intrinsic value of the human being includes every stage of the human existence. Excluding the beginning or the end of human life from the definition fundamentally undermines the intrinsic value of the human being and is therefore a violation of human dignity. Thus, there is a particular need to protect vulnerable, disabled, or unborn members of the human family. ECPM advocates that both European institutions and Member States should always uphold the principle of human dignity from conception until natural death.

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union:

Art. 1: Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.

Art. 2: Everyone has the right to life.

BIO- ETHICS

Generally speaking, this is not an area of competence of the European Union, but of the Member States. However, the development of new technology and greater integration have created opportunities for the EU institutions to interfere in bio-medical issues.

The first and only legally binding international text designed to protect human dignity against the misuse of biomedicine is the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (**Oviedo Convention**), 1997¹. It states that the interests of human beings must come before the interests of science or society. The convention prohibits the creation of human embryos for research purposes and requires adequate protection of embryos where countries allow *in-vitro* research. It bans human cloning, trafficking of organs and tissues and, in general, the commercialization of the human body and its parts. It allows the cloning of cells and tissue considered to be ethically acceptable worldwide, but it argues that cloning embryonic stem cells should be approached with great reservations and left up to the individual states acceding to the Convention. In one of its protocols, it defines and safeguards fundamental rights in biomedical research, with a heavy emphasis on consent, safety and duty of care, confidentiality and the review of the research proposal by an ethics committee. These regulations are based on the principle of the individual as an end-in-itself and protecting the genetic make-up of the human species.

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/168007cf98> Text accessed July 2023.

ECPM agrees, fully or in part, with the Oviedo Convention and, according to the subsidiarity principle, supports its implementation at national level as the EU Member States see fit.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccine mandate and the injuries sustained by some of those who got one or any of vaccines, Art. 24 of the Convention is especially relevant: *“The person who has suffered undue damage resulting from an intervention is entitled to fair compensation according to the conditions and procedures prescribed by law.”* ECPM is encouraging EU Member States to hold the pharmaceutical companies liable for any vaccine-related injuries and to demand compensation accordingly. The Convention, as well as the attached protocols, reiterate several times that refusal to give consent to medical research or a medical procedure *“shall not lead to any form of discrimination against the person concerned, in particular regarding the right to medical care.”*

REPRODUCTION & CONTRACEPTION

ECPM strongly supports the Member States’ right to establish their own policies regarding reproduction and we encourage them, as well as the EU institutions, to promote and protect life from conception to natural death.

In line with Art.13(1) of the Regulation EC 726/ 2004² establishing the European Medicines Agency and Art. 4(4) of the Directive 2001/83/EC³ on the Community code relating to medicinal products for human use, Member States are free to prohibit or restrict the sale, supply or use of contraceptives or abortifacients.

At the same time, we support our members’ initiatives at national level to support women in crisis, to demand increased state aid to pregnant women and to educate the general population about the preciousness of life.

SURROGACY

ECPM members stand firmly against any form of surrogacy, whether altruistic or commercial. It goes against human dignity and reduces people to commodities. The surrogacy process most often involves a contract, in which the commissioning woman, man, or couple have ownership over another woman’s womb (the surrogate mother) for the duration of the pregnancy. They can dictate and decide what happens to the baby if it is revealed that it has defects or diseases; they can force the surrogate mother to undergo an abortion, even if she disagrees, because they are the “owners” of the pregnancy. This right of ownership over someone else’s body could be regarded as violating Article 1 of the Geneva Convention: *“Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.”*⁴ The right to property includes the right to use, enjoy and dispose of it; all three of these principles are found in surrogacy agreements, which makes the commissioning party the owner(s) of the surrogate mother’s womb and pregnancy.

It also violates the human dignity of the child, since it is now considered the object or product of a contract, of a transaction. The right of a child to know his biological parents and be raised by them (Art. 7 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵) could be endangered as well, depending on the surrogacy agreement. In cases of surrogacy, up to six adults can claim parental rights over the child. This can lead to many legal complications, especially when there is an international/ cross-border dimension to the case.

We stand against the European Commission’s Proposal for a Council Regulation (2022) on the creation of a European Certificate of Parenthood⁶ which undermines the Member States’ sovereignty, the principle of subsidiarity, and would legalize surrogacy in all States, violating the human dignity of women and children by reducing them to commercial products.

DISABILITY

ECPM believes that life is precious and worthy of protection. Every life matters, even if it is not viewed as perfect. People living with physical or mental disabilities are fully part of our societies and they need and deserve special

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:02004R0726-20220128#tocId20>

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32001L0083&qid=1690457282467>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/slavery-convention>

⁵ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf

⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/civil-justice/family-law/recognition-parenthood-between-member-states_en

accommodations. We urge EU Member States to financially and judicially support people living with disabilities, to remove obstacles and discrimination and to ensure they live full and dignified lives.

AGING & EUTHANASIA

Thanks to better healthcare, people in Europe live longer, but they are also at a higher risk for poverty, loneliness and depression as they age. ECPM stands for aging with dignity. The elderly should be treated with respect and gratitude for all the work they did in their lives; they should also receive the pension they are owed adjusted for the cost of living. In the case of homemakers, we propose they receive retirement benefits in line with minimum wage rates. We support efforts and initiatives which seek to alleviate loneliness and depression in the elderly, and which promote mental health, an autonomous lifestyle and community. ECPM advocates for inter-generational solidarity, where younger people are able to take care of the elderly. We think that informal and customized care should be prioritized. Those taking care of their neighbours or family members should get financial support for their work. Occupational therapy or special coaching by mobility experts helps the elderly to maintain an autonomous living.

ECPM strongly advocates for palliative care as the only option for end-of-life stage. Ending life when it is 'not worthy to live' is not acceptable to us, since that runs contrary to the intrinsic value of the person. Having a robust social network, customized care, life-coaches for mental health and quality palliative care means life can be dignified until the end.

Summary

- ECPM considers the family- made up of mother, father, and children- as the basic unit of society which needs to be respected and protected.
- We denounce and reject the EU institutions' interference in and pressure on Member States regarding family policy.
- ECPM members actively support national policies which promote parenthood and create flexible conditions for child rearing.
- We discourage economic-based migration as that impacts the family left behind and weakens relationships structures.
- ECPM condemns any form of domestic violence and supports victims coming forward and reporting it.
- We support the best interest of the child as primordial in any action by public authorities. We advocate for state assistance for children at risk of poverty, exclusion, or violence. We ask for increased protections of children online.
- We state the parents' right of education of their children and affirm their power of information + decision on the subjects they learn in school.

In line with our relational thinking and Christian tradition, we see family as the primordial structure, preceding the state and any other community or group. Healthy families lead to a healthy society; therefore, values which are essential for a healthy family – love, solidarity, altruism, faithfulness - should be promoted in the public sphere, especially via educational policies. In times of crisis, we advise counselling; we stand firm for the rights of children in case marriages are ending. ECPM promotes the sovereignty of the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, and recognizes its inherent rights that are inalienable. As such, ECPM promotes (national) policymaking which puts family in focus.

ECPM believes that family policy is foremost a matter of national competence. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, the European institutions should not interfere in family policies of Member States. However, there are related areas where the EU has legislative powers, as for example labour laws. ECPM asks that the European Union exercise power in these areas carefully, fully respecting the opinions of the Member States. We demand that the EU refrains from taking any initiatives on family policy or from proposing legislation that goes against/ over national legislation of Member States, or which is pushing for alternative family forms.

At a national level, ECPM members support policies promoting parenthood and creating conditions that are conducive to child-raising. We are concerned about the European demographic winter and worry about its economic consequences. We advocate for policies fostering reconciliation between qualifications, labour market participation and family life. Parents should have the choice between childcare services and working fewer hours to take care of their children, especially if it concerns children with disabilities. Flexible work conditions (work-provided childcare, job sharing, remote working, sabbatical leave etc.) are also important for single parents who have less income and would have a difficult time caring for their children, employment, and household tasks. ECPM is strongly in favour of parental leave and care.

We recognize the particular vulnerability of low-skilled people who need to support their family. This is compounded by automatization already replacing many of the low-skilled jobs. Undeniably, there is a threat of increasing long-term unemployment for this group of the population. Based on Christian principles, ECPM strongly favours inclusive national policies where people are supported to further their education, they are put in contact with available job opportunities and possible re-training. ECPM does not believe in "lost cases" and discourages migration out of poverty or necessity from Southern & Eastern Europe to Northern and Western Europe. We believe that phenomenon has a largely negative impact on the members of the families left behind.

We are concerned about the rise in domestic violence, especially during the COVID19 lockdowns. We condemn any sort of abuse and violence and find it particularly reprehensible when it occurs between spouses or inside the family. ECPM strongly supports reporting such instances to authorities, coupled with counselling, anger

management classes, addiction and rehabilitation programs, as well as lifelong mentorship and accountability systems.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The rights of the child are set out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 24/2) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). ECPM supports the principle that the best interest of the child should be the primary consideration in all action related to children taken by public authorities both at the European and the national level. We believe the rights of children already start at conception; therefore, unborn children should be included in the right to life. We advocate for support, training, and financial support for expectant mothers.

Children are particularly vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, violence, and abuse. International commitments for the improvement of the lives of children such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a necessary first step, but we call on the EU Member States to do more: to adopt specific legislation guaranteeing daily meals, free primary and secondary education, children allowance and to invest in developing recreational community centres.

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

Article 24.2: In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Art.3.2: States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

We applaud the adoption of the EU Commission strategy- Better Internet for Kids⁷- in 2022 and we continue to advocate for increased protection of children online, including the passing of an EU Directive against cyberbullying. We are staunch defenders of children's privacy and innocence online.

FREEDOM OF EDUCATION

We affirm that education is a competence of the Member States, not of the European Union. We take note of the trend of the EU gradually interfering in school curricula, in subjects taught, as well as in methods. ECPM believes that parents should have the freedom to choose how they want to raise their children and which values and beliefs they want to pass on to them. We advocate for the parents' right to be informed about and to oppose certain views or subjects be taught to their children in school.

Education is essential for today's children to be tomorrow's independent, smart, well-adjusted adults and for their gifts and abilities to be nourished and developed. In general, we find it beneficial for children to go to school and interact with other children there; this develops their social skills as well. In certain cases, however, home-schooling may be a valid alternative. The neglect of rural schools and the brain drain toward urban areas particularly worries us. We urge national governments to invest more in local schools and to shorten the distance between an educational institution and the community.

⁷ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/strategy-better-internet-kids>

ECONOMY BENEFITTING PEOPLE AND PLANET

Summary

- ECPM advocates for a relational view of the economy where healthy relationships between people is the end goal of systems and structures, not increasing profits. To that end, we favour small & medium enterprises, family-owned business and stakeholder business models.
- We are critical of international agreements which disempower communities and even countries. We equally condemn concentration of power by merging mega companies and monopolization. Any policy which deprives the global South of equity and justice and perpetuates the colonial extraction model is to be rejected.
- ECPM supports innovation as long as it does not infringe on human dignity and human rights, as long as it does not violate privacy rights and doesn't harm the environment. We propose a mixed private/public R&D environment working towards making Europe self-reliant, competitive and sustainable.
- ECPM opposes indebtedness as a means to create wealth, including the NextGenEU program.
- We oppose the pursuit of having a single currency in the EU and demand that fiscal and cohesion policies prioritize SMEs, regional companies, rural areas and communities.
- The principle of subsidiarity must be respected fully when allocating CAP funds. While the EU has a general responsibility to ensure food safety and quality, the specific measures need to be decided at national level.
- ECPM believes Christians have a God-given duty to protect the Earth and its resources.

We are the first European political party to adopt a relational view of the economy and to propose it as a working policy for the European Union. Simply put, a relational view of the society holds that healthy relationships between people is to be the underlying theme and end goal of systems. In other words, we put people before profits. The economy must serve human dignity in the widest sense of the word. We advocate for economic policies which take into account their impact on relationships between peoples, between institutions, between stakeholder groups, and between individuals, and which are tested to produce greater interaction and mutual understanding, fairness to all included parts, and a convergence of purpose and values. We do not believe economic growth can continue at the current rate indefinitely, nor do we believe that should be the goal of economic policies.

EU and Member States' economic policies should:

- be people and family-centred, not driven by short-term profits;
- apply the potential of technology by respecting human dignity;
- practice transparency;
- cultivate long- term thinking;
- be as inclusive as possible (reject pressure from vested interests at the expense of other stakeholders);
- not erode the rule of law and democracy.

STAKEHOLDER MODEL

Based on this relational thinking, we encourage the development of small and medium-sized companies (counting for two thirds of private sector jobs in the EU) and we advocate for an investment-friendly climate for innovative entrepreneurs. We propose the stakeholder-focused business form (cooperatives, employee-owned business etc.) as a more just and healthier model to build the economy. Concentration of (political and economic) power can lead to corruption, to greedy extraction of resources and lack of accountability. We are critical of the view that privatisation is the answer to any public service that is not functioning optimally, and we recommend a case-by-case approach where fairness, affordability and efficiency are respected.

TRADE

ECPM is critical of international agreements which disempower people (and sometimes even countries) merely for the benefit of multinationals and the world of international finance. The principles of free trade and open market economy are essential to Europe's economies; however, there need to be checks and balances in the

system to keep it sustainable. Multinationals, shareholders, and capital markets are the first and major beneficiaries of any economic growth and hardly ever touched by reforms. On the other hand, workers have less security and stability for their families and economic growth does not translate in economical long-term security for the average people. This disparity fuels left and right-wing populism and translates to political instability.

INNOVATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

ECPM believes that God gave people a mandate to develop and care for His creation (Genesis 2:15), and as such, we need to be aware and involved in the conversation about technology, artificial intelligence (AI), bio-ethics etc. Innovation is not a neutral subject but requires careful and ethical consideration. It should especially foster greater interaction between people and strengthen relationships and communities. We support innovation as long as it does not infringe on human dignity and human rights, as long as it does not violate privacy rights and doesn't harm the environment. We recognize that innovation is sometimes not a pleasant process for citizens and established companies, therefore we advocate for support and re-training for those who need it.

We support ongoing efforts to make our continent self-sufficient, to reduce supply chains and reliance on countries like Russia and China. Europe needs to continue strengthening its position in the world as a technology hub by investing more in Research & Development. For decades now, the average spending on R&D of EU member states is lower than the OECD⁸ average⁹, despite sustained efforts by the EU.

We propose striking a balance between government- funded R&D and private efforts. Leaving research and development completely to the market is risky, since large corporations who can afford it are mainly interested in maximising profits, while ethical concerns are secondary. They will also swallow up smaller enterprises which come up with new inventions, further consolidating their power; this is why antitrust laws are essential for preventing monopolies and maintaining healthy competition. On the other hand, government funding can help develop technologies and services which directly benefit consumers but may not generate significant profit. It can directly set up innovation incubators or fund labs and projects via higher education institutes, whether public or private. We also advocate for governments to reduce innovation barriers, such as unnecessary bureaucracy or excessive taxation. Small entrepreneurs should especially benefit from government support and protection. The EU can play a major role in harmonizing rules and regulations for innovative technologies between Member States.

In order to foster innovation, ECPM members highly favour diversifying education and fighting corruption. Higher education must be encouraged and made accessible/ affordable to anyone who wishes to pursue it, while trades and vocational training should be equally available throughout the European Union. ECPM strongly supports fighting corrupt behaviour, oligarchic tendencies, bribery and nepotism which are detrimental to competitiveness and the countries' economic health in the long run.

FINANCE & SERVICES

Here are a few policy recommendations we put forward:

- redirect the cohesion policies in such a way that regional-based companies and inclusive business models can get preference treatment in economic stimulation programs and tendering. We want to end the current practice where large companies & multinationals are automatically the largest beneficiaries of EU economic support policies (both in the CAP¹⁰ and cohesion policies);
- shift the burden of proof in EU Merger Control to require not just clear absence of negative outcomes but demonstration of positive social benefits;
- end the objective of achieving a single currency area for the whole of the EU and meanwhile re-enable a flexible exchange rate regime for the rapid correction of balance of payments disequilibria;
- use the Human Development Index as measurement of economic progress at EU level as well as other non-GDP measures;
- make integrated reporting the European standard for corporations and introduce metrics that directly measure relationship quality between stakeholders;

⁸ OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development

⁹ <https://data.oecd.org/rd/gross-domestic-spending-on-r-d.htm>

¹⁰ CAP- Common Agriculture Policy

- expand the agreement reached over tax avoidance by lowering the turnover ceiling significantly in order to achieve that 90% of multinationals will have to report to publish a breakdown of the tax they pay in each of the bloc's member states and in tax havens (increased country-by-country reporting);
- European political parties and foundations need to be relieved from the obligation to match-fundraise in order to reduce undue influence by large and multinational business in European politics.

The recent health crisis caused by COVID-19 deeply impacted the market and consumers' livelihoods. The twenty-seven EU Member States agreed as a bloc to borrow on the capital market and share those funds according to national recovery plans (half are grants, the other half loans), via the Next Generation EU scheme. Next Generation EU's main objective is making the EU more resilient by fast-tracking digitalisation and the green transition. While we understand and agree that crisis situations require sometimes unusual measures, we are generally opposed to indebtedness as a way to create wealth. Regarding the Next Gen program in particular, we oppose it because we see a debt this big as unsustainable and a burden we are passing on to our children.

INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE

For the European single market to function properly, there needs to be a level playing field and a set of rules acceptable for all stakeholders in industry and agriculture. The common provisions regulating the structural and investment funds (ESI) for industry, transportation, agriculture and fishery in the European Union can be found in Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.¹¹ We agree with Art. 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹² that we should strengthen our cohesion by reducing disparities between levels of development of the various EU regions, and that particular attention should be paid to rural areas.

We affirm the European institutions' role in promoting clean and sustainable industries and business practices, in encouraging innovation and in making sure the polluter pays. We condemn the use of forever chemicals (PFASs) and call on the EU to permanently ban their use. Regarding infrastructure and transportation, which directly affects internal trade, a better connectivity and seamless transfers are necessary. We call for removal of bottlenecks, clear legal frameworks and enforcement, and fair and safe working conditions. Since transportation is the second-largest source of emissions in Europe, we support efforts to decarbonize it and replace it with clean, sustainable options. The transition needs to be gradual and in places where citizens would be heavily impacted, we call for governments to subsidize and mitigate the impact.

Agriculture is one of the biggest expenses of the European Union; for the 2021-2027 period, 387 billion in funding has been allocated to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).¹³ ECPM calls for serious reform of the CAP, where the principle of subsidiarity is respected. The agricultural conditions vary greatly from country to country and, while food safety and quality products should be the EU's goal in deploying the CAP funds, the specific measures should be set and enforced by national governments. We disagree with blanket policies imposed in a top-down manner from Brussels and which are difficult or impossible to be implemented by some farmers. We are against food imports from third countries which are of an inferior quality than European products and labelling them "made in the EU".

Regarding fishery, ECPM believes that it should be a priority for EU institutions to deliver on the promise of regionalization. Fishery policies are currently too centralized. This urge of unification has led to many practical problems in the field. The 2013 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) centred around setting sustainable catch limits with the objective to restore stocks, maintain healthy ecosystems and safeguard stable, profitable fisheries for the EU fleet. It also called for a more regional approach with only a basic framework from Brussels, which ECPM supports. However, a 2020 analysis¹⁴ of the reform showed that this regionalization approach led to uneven implementation of the catch limits recommendations, rendering the 2013 reform of the CFP toothless. We call for a more realistic approach between regionalization and harmonising the legislation.

¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1303>

¹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT>

¹³ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27_en

¹⁴ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2021/03/lessons-from-implementation-of-the-eus-common-fisheries-policy>

SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

ECPM believes that wise stewardship of the environment and its resources is a biblical assignment. Most scientists agree that human actions have a large effect on our planet and climate. ECPM agrees that we need to improve our resilience in the face of climate change and that we have a responsibility towards future generations. We reject any approach that pits caring for the environment against traditional family values and which places the burden and cost of environmental policies solely on the taxpayer. We also advocate for economic justice and equitable development between Europe and the global south and are against greedy, colonial-minded extraction of the South's resources and its pollution.

The EU institutions in collaboration with the Member States should continually look for ways to protect the environment in a manner that does not stifle technological innovation. It is not an either/or situation, ECPM argues that technological innovation can be used to protect the environment, offset the negative effects caused by people & industry, and also to provide us with the energy and resources we need to live. In this respect, all European countries should strive towards a CO₂ reduction in order to limit the global warming. The market for clean energy needs to reflect the current technological possibilities as well as to respect the principles of fair market competition. The EU should assist Member States to meet these standards and to invest in innovative economies.

Like the other policies mentioned, and in line with our relational thinking, we believe that caring for the creation needs to take place at all levels. At grassroots level, individuals need to adjust their mindset and habits regarding food waste, use of plastics and chemicals, and travelling. Entrepreneurs and businesses need to build in sustainability in their models. States and governments must educate the population on the effects of their choices, must provide incentives, and legislate to protect the water, land and air for their citizens. At a meta (EU) or global level, we welcome international conventions which protect ecosystems of global and historic significance (like the Amazon or the Arctic), which promote peace, and which sanction the greatest polluters (US, China and Russia).

FREEDOM, SECURITY AND STABILITY

Summary

- ECPM's approach to foreign affairs is based on human dignity: we promote fundamental human rights as the best way to counter extremism and violence. Foreign policies are the competence of Member States.
- We are in favour of all European military co-operation be conducted within the NATO. We call for an immediate end to Russia's aggression in Ukraine and for peace to be restored.
- ECPM encourages solidarity among Member States when it comes to migration and refugees and securing borders. We are in favour of including Romania and Bulgaria in the Schengen area.
- The EU must increase resilience against cyberthreats and cyber terrorism.
- We call for an urgent assessment of the foreign aid the EU disburses to third countries and for prioritising the countries and regions which respect human rights.

ECPM stands for fundamental freedoms, underpinned by human dignity as the cornerstone, and we work to see them respected and applied everywhere in the world. We believe that societies which have human rights and freedom as their foundation are not easily susceptible to abuses of power, dictatorship or authoritarianism but they are stable, thriving environments. The best way to counter terrorism, conflict and humanitarian crises around the world is to promote and insist on the adoption and implementation of fundamental human rights in those societies.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The ECPM approach to foreign affairs is based on the Christian understanding of human dignity. Fundamental freedoms such as freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression and political freedoms are the safeguard and practical expression of this understanding of human dignity. Human dignity is indivisible and equal for every person and therefore these fundamental freedoms apply to every person. It is our firm conviction that the spread of fundamental freedoms is key for the development of a more secure and stable world. It is important that in our policies we apply the same principles at home and abroad. Fundamental freedoms cannot be separated since each freedom supports the other and together, they form a culture in which all fundamental freedoms are self-evident.

Foreign affairs continues to be the competence of the Member States. We would like to see the EEAS¹⁵ role be reduced to facilitator/ mediator/ ambassador, acting on policies determined by joint decision of the Member States. The power and initiative should rest with the foreign offices of the Member States, and not be imposed on them from Brussels. We urge the EU Member States to engage much stronger with all political and society actors in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and Asia that support and implement fundamental freedoms such as freedom of religion, equality of women, freedom of expression and democratic multi-ethnic governance; they should get preferential treatment when it comes to aid and trade.

The ECPM supports Israel, prays for peace, and is clear on Israel's right to exist.

SECURITY & MIGRATION

Cooperation between Member States in the field of security should centre on four areas: military co-operation, border security, cyber security, and anti-terrorism.

Military co-operation

ECPM is in favour of all European military co-operation be conducted within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Europe has been leaning on the USA for security and defence for many years now. However, we should not take it for granted or believe that these services were offered to us without any obligations. The interests of the USA do not always align with those of the European nations, and we need to remain vigilant about that.

¹⁵ EEAS- European External Action Service

In line with EU's principle of subsidiarity, defence matters fall under the authority of the sovereign Member States. Only states can have a standing army, so the question of a Europe-wide defence force immediately touches upon the sovereignty of EU Member States and the nature of EU itself.

“A common de-nationalised army would, and could, no longer owe obedience to a national authority, either as a whole nor in respect of the units of which it is composed. It would have sworn loyalty to the Community. The Community alone would have power over it. If any of its units were to follow the orders of a national Government, they would be regarded as deserters or rebels. If, therefore, such an army is set up, the only valid orders will have to come from an authority recognised by all the participating States.”- Robert Schuman

A single defence market would reduce the sovereignty of smaller Member states and nations would lose sovereign control over defence manufacturing capabilities in favour of big military industrial groups which would have profits as their priority, not the security of the peoples of Europe. However, we encourage cooperation between Member States, harmonising equipment and tools, training together, and standardizing procedures and operations.

The current war of aggression started by Russia in Ukraine constitutes a threat for EU Member States like Poland, Romania, and the Baltic countries. We call for the cease of violence and hostilities and for all parties involved to seek peace and reconciliation. At the same time, we encourage solidarity with the border countries in dealing with the refugee influx and the impact the war is having on their energy, economy and trade.

Border security

The European Union does not have any internal border controls anymore (Schengen area), except with Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Ireland. The lack of internal borders also creates some vulnerabilities, while the member countries forming the external border of the Union have a bigger responsibility and burden to maintain the safety of the Union than the interior countries do. ECPM calls for increased support for the border countries, either financially or in terms of personnel. The members of ECPM also support Romania's and Bulgaria's inclusion in the Schengen area.

The aftermath of the refugee crisis in 2016 opened up some fundamental debates about migration, about economic stability and about solidarity among EU member states. We believe foreign affairs issues and migration should take into account the internal realities and challenges of a Member State. ECPM is in favour of solidarity among the EU Member States when it comes to refugees and asylum seekers; we welcome the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism adopted in 2022.¹⁶ We condemn Turkey's frequent attempts at blackmailing the European Union in exchange for membership or certain political favours and using migrants as bargaining chips.

Concerning refugees, we believe that the human dignity of the refugee should be protected at all times. The asylum-seeking procedure should be fast, thorough and humane; the applicant must be provided with shelter, food and basic services. Once approved, their integration into society needs to happen as soon as possible; churches and NGOs should be encouraged to assist in this. We are in favour of integration policies which respect the migrants' culture and background, but educate and promote a human rights-centred view. We find practices like forced or underage marriage, female genital mutilation, shunning, etc. reprehensible and Sharia law deeply incompatible with European life and society. Human trafficking/ smuggling is a real threat for people fleeing a crisis and in a vulnerable situation; the European Union agencies (Frontex, Europol) need to do everything they can to prevent and apprehend those trafficking human beings. Unaccompanied refugee minors need to be treated as children first and foremost, following children rights legislation, and they need to be prioritised in settlement and integration efforts.

Cyber security

Attacks on public and private cyber infrastructure or on the electric grid can have severe consequences, considering how integrated our systems are already. The EU network is as strong as its weakest link: if one of the

¹⁶ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/european-solidarity-action-over-5-000-relocations-greece-2022-10-12_en

poorly protected networks is infiltrated, it will spread to all. Cyberthreats against our societies and infrastructure could come from state- as well as non-state actors which makes it difficult to decide whether to treat it as a military or civilian security operation. Cybercrimes should be included and punishable in international law.

It is concerning to see that often almost half or more of the staff working in cybersecurity are external contractors, which means they are not really under control and command of government. It is worth wondering if these external companies abide by the same values and ethics as military and government personnel are obliged to consider and whether their loyalties may be divided. A possible solution for this issue could be like the one Estonia¹⁷ is practicing. ECPM proposes that each EU Member State has its own cyber unit, and that they are all interconnected.

Anti-terrorism

The ECPM has consistently affirmed that terrorism can only be dealt with effectively if addressed at its roots. Ultimately any form of terrorism starts with extremist ideology that encourages violence as a means to achieve political goals. This ideology thrives in a low-education, low-information environment that is permissive towards this type of extremism. This demonstrates the need to promote both at home and abroad a culture based on human dignity and fundamental freedoms and which centres on education. The fight against terrorism in Europe cannot be disconnected from foreign policy and the need to set new priorities there as well.

We call for an urgent reassessment of all aid programs and other support given to entities outside the EU and to ensure that no funding ends up in the hands of extremists. European presence via 'front organisations' of entities which support extremist groups/ ideology needs to end.

All existing EU level structures that work on counterterrorism should get the funding and support that will enable them to cooperate more effectively with the Member States where needed. Special attention should be given to cooperation with Member States regarding visa applications if there is any reason for concern that Europe's security might be affected. Effective cross-border training of civil servants and officers in police and justice departments should be increased. An effective exchange between EU Member States of data regarding terror suspects, or those in connection with them, as well as extremist actors, is a clear priority.

¹⁷ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/estonia/11564163/Estonia-recruits-volunteer-army-of-cyber-warriors.html>

FIGHTING MODERN SLAVERY

Summary

- We condemn and fight any form of modern slavery which dehumanizes people and reduces them to commodities.
- We advocate for due diligence in business practices (i.e. ensuring forced labour was not used at any point in the supply chain) and for consumers to choose companies vetted for their fair and sustainable practice.
- We support the Nordic Model as a means of fighting sexual exploitation and encourage Member States to adopt legislation criminalizing the buyers of sex services and the traffickers. We urge governments to increase prosecution rates of traffickers, to develop nation-wide prevention and awareness campaigns and to work with NGOs in crafting robust exit programmes + legal assistance for victims.

Modern slavery is a dehumanizing act that reduces people to trading objects and violates their dignity. It distorts relationships and severely hurts people, making it a difficult process to re-establish new healthy ones. Most of the victims are used for sexual exploitation and forced labour. Since human trafficking is a cross-border crime, combating it requires international cooperation. ECPM strongly favours the Nordic model that decriminalizes the victim and criminalizes the client and the trafficker as the most effective way to stop human trafficking and (forced) prostitution. Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world: an estimated 50 million people around the world were victims of modern slavery in 2021 according to the global estimates of the International Labour Organization, of which almost 28 million were in forced labour and the other 22 million in forced marriage.¹⁸

FORCED LABOUR

Out of the 27.6 million people trapped in forced labour, 17.3 million are exploited in the private sector, 6.3 million in forced commercial sexual exploitation, and 3.9 million in forced labour imposed by state. Forced labour is prevalent in agricultural work, HORECA, in the garment industry, and in domestic work (nanny, au-pair). Most likely we have all eaten food or have in our possession clothes that have been produced by enslaved workers.

In Europe we notice a phenomenon of people from Eastern Europe travelling for work to the richer countries and being exploited (domestic, agricultural and construction workers in particular). An adopted report (2017)¹⁹ in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) highlighted the issue of domestic workers in Western Europe. The problematic conditions are exacerbated by differences in the legislation of Member States and the absence of a European-wide regulation on the matter. They often must work long hours for low wages and live in unsuitable conditions. Those who come from countries outside the EU are in an even worse situation because of restrictive sponsor-based immigration policies which link their visas to their employers. As a result, employers control the workers' immigration status and ability to change jobs, and sometimes whether the worker can return home. The record number of refugees pouring into Europe (Ukrainians, most recently, and from Middle East eight years ago) are in danger of exploitation by traffickers, children being particularly vulnerable.

ECPM believes that the efforts to prevent and combat forced labour should be aimed at all parts of the supply chain, especially in those sectors that have a high risk of exploitation. All companies, regardless of whether they operate in one European country or transnationally and regardless of where the abuse takes place, should be held accountable in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.²⁰ In cooperation with the Member States, the EU could compile a list of companies which do not comply with legislation against forced labour. If their non-compliance is systematic, then they could face an EU-wide ban in the trading of their goods.

¹⁸ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

¹⁹ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23682>

²⁰ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

At EU level, the proposed Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence²¹ should be strengthened to include downstream companies as well. EU companies should seek to obtain contractual assurances from direct and indirect partners that no forced labour was used in the supply chain. The contractual assurances must be accompanied by appropriate measures to verify compliance. The EU should also set up a platform for international exchange and cooperation based on ILO and Council of Europe expertise, with a view to sharing best practices to ensure decent work for domestic workers. Moreover, the EU can play a coordinating role in the sharing of best practices among Member States.

On the issue of domestic workers from Eastern European countries, EU Member States should work towards developing affordable and easily accessible complaint mechanisms, taking into consideration the needs of the domestic workers. Moreover, incentives and simplified procedures must be put in place for households which will enable them to formalize the employment of domestic workers. An example can be the employment cheques that have already been introduced in several Member States.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

According to the fourth European Commission report²² (2022) on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings, sexual exploitation continues to be the most prevalent purpose behind trafficking in the EU. Nearly three quarters of all victims in the EU were female (women and girls), predominantly trafficked for sexual exploitation. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Report on Trafficking in Persons published in 2020²³ confirms the findings of the Commission report at a global scale.

There are different legislative approaches to prostitution across Europe. In some European countries, prostitution is legalised and regulated (Austria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia and Netherlands), while in others it is legal but unregulated (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain). A second model is prohibition, either by punishing the prostitute (Croatia, Romania), punishing the client (France, Ireland, Sweden) or both (Lithuania).²⁴ The model practiced in France, Ireland and Sweden makes purchasing sexual services illegal, but there are protection measures in place for those who sell the services; this is called the Nordic Model and it is an approach which ECPM sees as beneficial. We base our position on long-term studies and data analysis from countries which decriminalized prostitution (The Netherlands, Germany) and which showed that (1) women continued to be at risk and in unsafe situations^{25,26} and (2) human trafficking increased.²⁷ On the other hand, the countries that followed the Nordic Model (Sweden²⁸) witnessed a decrease in the demand for sexual services over a decade and that the legislation was acting as a deterrent to human traffickers.

We welcome and support the recent report adopted by the European Parliament in September 2023 which highlights some positive results from the implementation of the Nordic Model and admits at the same time that this approach “*is not a fix-all solution to reduce demand*”. It also brought up the insufficient budgeting for exit programmes which in some countries (e.g. France) increases the dangers for the persons trapped in prostitution and makes it harder to get out. We call on the Member States governments and public agencies to engage all actors in civil society and make establishing robust, well-funded exit programmes a priority.

The PACE report²⁹ adopted in 2014 called “*Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery in Europe*”, in addition to supporting the Nordic Model, exit programmes and comprehensive legal assistance, also called for the banning of sexual services ads, including forms of disguised advertising. We fully support the report and call on the EU Member States to adopt and implement its recommendations.

²¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1145

²² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0736>

²³ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip-2020.html>

²⁴ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695394/IPOL_STU\(2021\)695394_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695394/IPOL_STU(2021)695394_EN.pdf)

²⁵ <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/the-failure-of-legalization-of-prostitution-in-the-netherlands/>

²⁶ <https://www.cahrv.uni-osnabrueck.de/reddot/BroschuereProstGenglisch.pdf>

²⁷ https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/45198/1/Neumayer_Legalized_Prostitution_Increase_2012.pdf

²⁸ https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/1049_swedish_prostitution_summary_original.pdf

²⁹ <https://pace.coe.int/pdf/87d846fdefbe14cf7cdd6b0e5df435981c4734e623d9cc6d3957000e53bcc386/res.%201983.pdf>

The most important piece of legislation continues to be the 2011/36/EU Directive on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.³⁰ The Directive requires Member States to criminalize the use of sexual services if there is knowledge that the person is a victim of human trafficking. In December 2022, the European Commission published a proposal for a revision³¹ of the 2011 Directive that will have to be approved by the Parliament and the Council. The updated wording calls Member States to make it a criminal offence using sex services provided by exploited persons. We welcome the updated wording and urge Member States to implement it.

Additionally, we encourage Member States to intensify awareness programs through media and in schools and work on eliminating stigma and shame for victims.

Finally, Member States should strengthen existing frameworks for identifying and referring potential victims of trafficking and ensure they get the needed support (National Referral Mechanisms) in accordance with the recommendations³² of the OSCE and the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive.

³⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:101:0001:0011:en:PDF>

³¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022PC0732>

³² <https://www.osce.org/odihr/510014>

REFORMING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Summary

- ECPM calls for the European Union to reduce its directive role and to act more as a facilitator between strong, sovereign Member States. We wish to see a reduction of the bureaucracy and the elimination of redundant or wasteful agencies.
- We reject uniformity and turning the EU into a superstate; instead, we propose a confederal model.
- ECPM favours EU Neighbourhood policy and initiatives like the European Political Community instead of full membership. We are opposed to Turkey becoming EU member.

ECPM sees the EU as an instrument of peace, like the founding fathers envisioned it (see Treaty of Paris).³³ As such, we stand firmly for the principle of subsidiarity enshrined in the EU treaties; we believe the EU institutions should maintain a coordinating role, while the national governments enjoy full power of decision on matters of national competence.

ROLE OF THE EU

We believe that a European Union that is less directive and more facilitating will be more beneficial for EU citizens and will form an effective narrative against destructive far-right sentiments. To many, the EU has grabbed power and authority which does not belong to it and has been using that power to impose its will and ideology on the Member States. ECPM is critical of the European Commission's right of initiative, which leads to imposing Regulations and Directives on Member States by unelected bureaucrats, legislation acts which often go further than the founding treaties intended. We also advocate for longer debate times in the European Parliament on important issues, to ensure that the citizens' representatives can truly influence the legislative process. ECPM suggests periodically reviewing EU treaties and guidelines and deciding if they need to be continued, amended, or removed; redundant or ineffective legislation should be discarded. Likewise, European entities or agencies that have no added value and operate outside the EU competencies or infringe on national competences should be eliminated. Criteria for European agencies should be subsidiarity, economics, and pan-European cooperation. In general, ECPM wants more transparency on how the EU Budgets are spent on projects in member states since, too often, gross misspending comes to light.

ECPM acknowledges the EU's significant role in combating money laundering and tax evasion. We see a clear role for the EU preventing multinationals from pitting one EU Member State against another. Transparent and fair rules, as well as rigorous monitoring by the EU institutions, are key.

ROLE OF THE MEMBER STATES

We advocate for sovereign and empowered Member States and for the European Union institutions to strictly adhere to the principle of subsidiarity. We believe more control should be returned to national parliaments, which would also increase their responsibility. The citizens would feel less sceptical of Brussels if they felt their representatives and governments have a bigger role and that decision-making is closer to them. Any decision that would cede some of the Member State's sovereignty would have to be accepted by at least 2/3 majorities in national parliaments.

A NEW MODEL

ECPM, together with Sallux, promotes a *"confederal Europe which is neither a withdrawal from the European project nor a headlong and premature rush towards full political integration"*.³⁴ The Member States' diverse economies and the various groupings to which they belong (Schengen, banking union, Eurozone etc.) make one-size-fits-all solutions untenable. Efforts for uniformity are misplaced and risky. Instead, we propose a model which would offer more flexibility. Member States could act more effectively together on issues of economic divergence if their economies are more similar and their preferences not adversative. States forming smaller

³³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:11951K:EN:PDF>

³⁴ <https://sallux.eu/products/confederal-europe.html>

groups around an issue, a priority or common background- like the Visegrad 4, the Benelux or the Baltic Group- could be an example of better cooperation (and a possible Plan B in case the EU project fails).

EU NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY OVER EU ACCESSION

We encourage the European Union to offer partnerships (like the EU Neighbourhood Policy) to non-EU countries, instead of membership. This would create more European cooperation and cohesion and it would expand the options of working frameworks. In the current situation, expansion of the European Union is inadvisable. Therefore, ECPM supports options such as association agreements and the newly created European Political Community which allows privileges without actual membership. Political deals on the schedule for full membership cannot be made anymore; only countries which fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria³⁵ can become a member.

We stand in firm opposition to Turkey ever becoming part of the EU. It has grave failings regarding the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Forms of partnerships, other than membership, can be explored once Turkey starts upholding fundamental freedoms such as freedom of the press, freedom of religion and protection for minorities.

³⁵ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/accession-criteria_en

HONOURING EU'S CHRISTIAN ROOTS

Summary

- The ECPM believes that the Christian values- freedom, truth, solidarity- which were at the root of founding the European Union need to be acknowledged and appreciated; they are still relevant and useful today.
- We stand for the freedom of religion or belief of all people, including the right to worship publicly, wear religious symbols and teach their children in the faith. We pray for the hundreds of millions of persecuted Christians around the world.
- We advocate for respect for FoRB to be added as a priority in foreign affairs and for the role of the Special Envoy to be strengthened.
- ECPM condemns the increase in discrimination and violations of the freedom of conscience of Christians in Europe and the lack of reasonable accommodations or space for conscientious objection.

We believe key teachings of Christianity such as freedom, love, truth, reconciliation and solidarity are relevant, useful concepts for today's society. Behind our justice systems, behind the fundamental rights and freedoms we value greatly in Europe are Jesus' teachings, are God's ideas of Good and Evil. We value life because we see it as God-given; we love our neighbour and defend her/his freedom of expression (even if we might disagree) because we believe we are created by God, in His likeness. We believe in disagreeing without being disagreeable and without demonizing the opposite side. Our Christian faith informs our views, our decisions and political direction; and we believe it inspired the founding fathers of the European project as well. It is something the EU should recognize and be proud of. There is a plurality of faiths and beliefs in Europe now and for it to remain a rich and peaceful place, everyone needs to respect the other's faith and point of view. We are weary of secular anti-religious ideologies which want to erase the legacy of Christian thinking and play down its relevance.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is the right to hold religious beliefs, to change them or abandon them freely, to promote and express them openly, and to expect the state to protect individuals as they exercise their rights. Freedom of religion is a right that covers many distinct, yet interrelated, rights. For example, it ensures the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, worship, and observance. It includes parents' rights to pass their religious or moral education to their children and also the right to establish and maintain institutions that operate on a distinct ethos. It is among the most fundamental civil rights. The protection of freedom of religion or belief for all should be a priority for Christians since we see all human beings as created in the image of God, sharing the same fundamental rights. Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined not only in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also in many national, international, and European instruments.³⁶

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AROUND THE WORLD

There are worrying trends and many threats to freedom of religion or belief around the world. Today, more than 360 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. The latest report by Open Doors International shows that globally 1 in 7 Christians experiences high levels of persecution or discrimination. In Africa, this figure is 1 in 5, in Asia it is 2 in 5, and in Latin America 1 in 15.³⁷ Various resolutions and reports in the European Parliament and the PACE condemned the persecution and killing of Christians by terrorist groups such as ISIS.

Of course, Christians are not the only ones being persecuted. Pew Research studies³⁸ show that Muslims, the second largest religious group in the world, face daily discrimination and persecution as well (in Europe, China, even in the MENA region). Jews continue to be harassed worldwide and their cemeteries or temples vandalized.

³⁶ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf

³⁷ <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>

³⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2020/11/10/harassment-of-religious-groups-continues-to-be-reported-in-more-than-90-of-countries/>

Buddhists and Hindus suffer indignities, government restrictions or social hostilities in at least 21 countries, according to the same Pew study. ECPM believes that we should promote Freedom of Religion or Belief as a right for everyone regardless of their religious beliefs. This applies to believers of all religions provided that they also in turn respect religious plurality and the right of all individuals to choose a religious belief, but also no religion at all.

Following pressure from the European Parliament and civil society, the Council of the EU adopted in 2013 several guidelines³⁹ on the promotion and protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief. In these guidelines, the Council of the EU recognized that protection of FoRB contributes to “*democracy, rule of law, development, peace and stability*”. It also indicated that religious violence or obstacles to freedom of religion were often an early indicator of potential conflict. Although these guidelines were a positive step, they need to be followed by concrete actions to implement them and increase the visibility of FoRB in EU’s external relations. The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance underlined in their latest report⁴⁰ that the guidelines are useful, but an evaluation is necessary eight years after their adoption. This evaluation was required by the guidelines document and was supposed to be conducted by the Working Party on Human Rights from the Council (COHOM) within three years of their adoption, but it has yet to take place. ECPM supports the guidelines and insists on their proper implementation and evaluation.

Another step the EU institutions took was to create the post of Special Envoy for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union. This role was filled by Ján Figel between May 2016 and December 2019. His tenure yielded tangible results (e.g.: positive influence in the case of Asia Bibi) and showed that the EU has a significant role to play in the field of peaceful coexistence and religious pluralism. Member States have created positions similar to the one of the Special Envoy. After the end of Figel’s mandate, it took until December 2022 for this post to be filled again, this time by Belgian Ambassador Frans van Daele. The delay and the difficulties in this appointment unfortunately show that Freedom of Religion or Belief is still not a top priority for the EU. There are also concerns about the details of his mandate which is considered to be limited. We ask that the European Commission strengthen the mandate of the Special Envoy. One way to do that would be to introduce a multi-year term for this post subjected to annual review as it was stressed by a European Parliament resolution adopted in January 2019. We also believe that the role should be promoted to “High Representative for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU” preferably within the framework of the EEAS. This would further enhance the visibility and effectiveness of his role.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN EUROPE

At the same time, there are many challenges to Freedom of Religion or Belief as well as Freedom of Conscience within Europe. In the past few years, the EU attempted to widen the scope of the anti-discrimination legislation outside the labour market in a proposal for a Council Directive on “*implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation*”⁴¹ that is currently blocked in the Council. The draft Directive uses vague terms open to interpretation, widens the scope of application, and reverses the burden of proof from accuser to accused. The Directive would also have implications on freedom of conscience, since it would prohibit business owners to refuse providing goods and services to people when that violates their beliefs.

The PACE report on “*Tackling Intolerance and Discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians*”⁴² noted that intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief affect minority religious groups in Europe, but also people belonging to majority religious groups. Christians in Europe are sometimes harassed, intimidated or fired for publicly expressing their faith and religious values.⁴³⁴⁴ In other instances, the right of parents to opt

³⁹ www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/137585.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.religiousfreedom.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Intergroup-FoRB-Report-Final-2021.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-area-of-justice-and-fundamental-rights/file-anti-discrimination-directive>

⁴² <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=21549&lang=en>

⁴³ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/mp-pivi-rsnen-facing-second-trial-over-biblical-beliefs.html>

⁴⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/jan/15/landmark-victory-ba-cross-work>

their child out of individual classes or an entire course which the parents deem contrary to their religious beliefs was limited, despite it being enshrined in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. An older PACE report⁴⁵ also mentioned the cases where children belonging to religious minorities have been taken away by child protection agencies.

ECPM also stands with doctors who refuse to perform abortions and affirms their right to conscientious objection and reasonable accommodation. The state has an obligation to respect the freedom of conscience as it is a right enshrined in international and European Human Rights law. The conscientious objection of medical staff was also reiterated in the PACE report on *"The right to conscientious objection in lawful medical care"*.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23719>

⁴⁶ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17909>