

Paris, Monday 5 October 2009

EUROPE, HAVE COURAGE!

News Release at the end of the Plenary Assembly of the Council of Europe's Episcopal Conferences (CCEE) Paris, France, 1-4 October 2009

The Presidents of Europe's Bishops' Conferences met at the *Maison de la Conférence des Evêques de France* in Paris from 1-4 October 2009. In the course of their annual meeting the Presidents took the following decisions:

- **New member.** The Plenary Assembly unanimously approved the request of His Grace Mgr Joseph Soueif, Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, to become a member of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences. Therefore CCEE now comprises the Presidents of the 33 Bishops' Conferences in Europe, the Archbishops of Luxembourg, the Principality of Monaco, the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, and the Bishop of Chisinau (Moldavia);
- **New CCEE Commission.** The Plenary Assembly established a new episcopal CCEE Commission "Caritas in Veritate" which will have the task of promoting the sharing of Bishops' Conference activities in the areas of pastoral work on social issues, migration, justice, peace, and the safeguarding of creation; of encouraging Bishops' Conferences to work in these areas and coordinate activities of common interest.
- **Message from the participants at the Assembly.** The Plenary Assembly, which discussed the theme of Church-State relations, decided, in the light of changes that have taken place in the twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, to draw up a message which witnesses to how faith in Jesus Christ can give birth to a clear outlook full of hope. Attached is the message entitled *Europe, have courage. 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall: rediscovering the impetus, a hope to proclaim.*
- **Letter in support of the Bucharest Roman Catholic Cathedral.** Informed of the great risks to which St Joseph's Cathedral, the principal place of Catholic worship belonging to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest, is exposed, following the building of a massive construction only 8 metres from the Cathedral wall, the Assembly expressed its profound concern for the survival of this place of worship, which has been from the point of view of both finance and morale, by the unwelcome building by the local community and by other religious denominations in Romania. For this reason the CCEE Plenary decided to address the letter of support to the Romanian people through the Archbishop of Bucharest, Mgr Ioan Robu (letter in Italian attached).
- **Letter of support of the Church and peoples of Honduras.** The Assembly decided to unite its voice to that of many others supporting the Church and Hondurian people in this difficult moment of political crisis (Letter in Spanish attached).
- **2010 Plenary Assembly.** The 2010 Plenary Assembly will take in Zagreb in Croatia from 30 September – 3 October 2010 at the invitation of the Archbishop of Zagreb and CCEE Vice-president, Cardinal Josip Bozanic, and the Bishop of Dakovo and Srijem, Mgr Marin Srakic, President of the Croatian Bishops' Conference.

Meeting with the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy.

In the course of the meeting, the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, met with a delegation from the CCEE Plenary (see News Release of 02.10.2009).

THEMES DISCUSSED DURING THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Church-State relations

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall (**9 November 1989**) which symbolically signified the end of the Iron Curtain between Western and Eastern Europe, many nations, especially from Central Eastern Europe, drew up new constitutions and, at the same time, wished to regularise, by laws and/or concordats, their relationships with the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the increasing influence which the European institutions are assuming in the life of the individual countries leads in some cases to modification of the legislation of these same countries when it conflicts with what has been agreed at a European level. For these reasons, the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences, driven by their pastoral task of caring for the people of God through the Church as institution, too, felt the need to be informed about the variety of solutions and models adopted by the individual States; about issues still "unresolved" and to have the opportunity to reflect together on the relationships which the Holy See maintains both with individual States and the European institutions, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe. After a reflection on the philosophical and theological foundations of the Church-State relationship, and the relationship between religion and society, the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences analysed and discussed the ways in which these relationships in the individual countries might be developed in a practical way also through the results of European research promoted by CCEE.

CCEE activities

In the course of the meeting reports were presented covering the various activities of the CCEE Commissions: CEEM (European Episcopal Commission for Media); "Migration" Commission; the "Catechesis, Schools and Universities" Commission; the European Vocations Service (EVS) and the "Environment" Commission. In particular, the Presidents approved the following events:

- **Plenary Assembly of the European Episcopal Commission for Media (CEEM)** on *The Internet culture and Church communication* (Rome, 12-15 November 2009);
- **VIII European Congress for bishops with responsibility for pastoral care of migrants** which will take place in Malaga, Spain, from 27 April – 1 May 2010 on the theme *The Europe of people on the move. Overcoming fears. Outlining perspectives*
- **A European Pilgrimage** which will go from Esztergom (Hungary) to Mariazell (Austria), passing through Slovakia, aimed at Bishops' Conference delegates with responsibility for environmental issues. The Pilgrimage will have the slogan "If you want peace, protect creation" and will take place from 1-5 September 2010.

Current issues

Bioethical issues: Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux and CCEE Vice-president, explained the procedure adopted by the French Bishops' Conference in the bioethics debate currently taking place in France. Participants considered this procedure to be a good model for Church-State co-operation even if some concerns remain about recent outcomes.

Gender theories: Cardinal André Vingt-trois, Archbishop of Paris and President of the French Bishops' Conference, highlighted questions raised for society and Church by *gender* theories. The Church proposes a vision essentially based on co-operation between man and woman and distances itself from the aggressive and distrustful idea behind gender theory.

Church and media: Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa and President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, reflected on media representation of Benedict XVI's Pontificate. Even if on the whole it appears adequate and largely positive, one notices, however, the risk of a reductive media representation which tends to emphasise interventions believed to be potentially confrontational and ignore certain fundamental themes which reveal the priorities of the Pontificate.

Christians in the Holy Land: the European bishops' concern for the Church and Christian people in the Holy Land was reflected in a presentation about the activities undertaken by the *Bishops' Conference Co-ordination for supporting the Church in the Holy Land*. The bishops expressed their serious concerns about the continuing exodus of Christians from the Holy Land and, in general, from all the Middle East nations.

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the Czech Republic and the Year for Priests. Participants then received two further reports: on the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Czech Republic, from the Bishop-delegate of the Czech Bishops' Conference; and on the activities underway in Croatia for the Year for Priests as an example of the manifold activities planned by Bishops' Conferences for this year.

Also participating at this meeting were Mgr Baltazar Enrique Porrai Cardozo, Archbishop of Mérida (Venezuela) and First **CELAM** (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano) Vice-president; and Cardinal Théodore-Adrien Sarr, Archbishop of Dakar and First **SECAM** (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) Vice-president. The European bishops assured them of their prayers for the success of the Synod for Africa which they look towards with intense hope.

At the end of the meeting, the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences thanked Cardinal André Vingt-Trois for his generous hospitality. The work had taken place in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, enriched by opportunities for prayer and the daily celebration of Mass.

The Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) gathers the Presidents of the current 33 European Bishops' Conferences of this Continent, represented by their Presidents, and the Archbishops of Luxembourg, the Principality of Monaco, and the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, as well as the Bishop of Chişinău (Moldavia). The President is Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Primate of Hungary; the Vice-Presidents are Cardinal Josip Bosanić, Archbishop of Zagreb, and Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux. The CCEE General Secretary is Fr Duarte da Cunha. The headquarters of the Secretariat is in St. Gallen (Switzerland).

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