



POLITICAL PROGRAM

2024- 2029



elevate. empower. engage.

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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 through 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 significant 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 significant 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 deeply committed to exploring and investigating how 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

Human dignity expresses the intrinsic value of every human being, it is the basis of human rights. We believe this universal principle rests on the human being created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, life is God-given and should be protected from conception to natural death. The protection of human dignity should be a priority above individual freedom. ECPM believes that a vibrant and positive Europe should celebrate and promote life. In line with the subsidiarity principle, ECPM believes that the European institutions should refrain from openly promoting any specific view on this matter. They should not interfere in bio-ethical issues and the definition of life. Sadly enough, the European institutions often promote and fund an anti-life view. ECPM calls for a more modest and objective stance on this issue, especially related to funding of NGOs active in this area.

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 a responsibility to protect others - 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 believes that both European institutions and member states should always uphold the principle of human dignity from conception until natural death (although it is not the task of the European institutions but rather the responsibility of the member states).

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The rights of the child are set out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 24/2) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN 1989) (Article 3). ECPM supports the principle that 'the best interests 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.

The rights of children already start at conception. Unborn children should be included in the right to life. Everyone has the right to be born. We therefore encourage all kinds of coaching and support for expectant mothers.

Children are particularly vulnerable to 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 education, children allowance and to encourage the development of recreational community centres. We applaud the adoption of the EU Commission strategy- Better Internet for Kids- in 2022 and we continue to advocate for increased protection of children online, including the passing of an EU Directive against cyberbullying.

We believe that sustainable policies favouring the family are the most effective way to improve children's living conditions and opportunities. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the family is the primary institution promoting the rights of children. Parents have a natural interest in protecting the rights of their children. EU law and national legislation must guarantee balanced rights for both.

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.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ONLINE

ECPM is concerned about child sexual exploitation online which constitutes serious violations of fundamental rights, particularly the rights of children, the protection and care, as envisaged by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the two Optional Protocols of 2002, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

This phenomenon requires a comprehensive approach covering the prosecution of offenders, prevention and protection of victims. ECPM believes the EU has an important role to play in finding answers to this important challenge of our time. It is the role of all EU member states to protect and ensure a safe environment for children and their development based on the subsidiarity criterion. Thus, ECPM calls on the EU to complement the actions of the member states in improving the international cooperation and increasing the level of protection for children.

The definition of child sexual abuse materials should be clarified in the international contexts. Children need to be informed in an easy and child-friendly way of the risks and consequences of using their personal data online. Their personal data online must be duly protected. For all these purposes, child protection officers, paediatricians and youth and children's organizations must play an active role in raising awareness on this issue.

REFUGEE CHILDREN

The EU member states should cooperate on supporting child protection systems where the child's best interests are considered, regardless of their status. The care that refugee minors receive in the reception centres is key factor in their long-term adjustment and should be regulated at the national level.

ECPM requests that the actions at European level to be complementary to the member states' measures which would ensure that any child needing protection receives it and that, regardless of their immigration status, citizenship or background, all children are treated as children first and foremost. In our view, the officials coming in direct contact with children should:

- be adequately trained and qualified to identify children at risk;
- inform them and respond to their needs;
- coordinate at European level in police operations aiming at combating trafficking of children;
- enhance the capacity of existing networks with expertise and experience in the protection of refugee minors;
- ensure that refugee children have access to and are using hotlines created to respond to their disappearances.

AGING

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. We are aware of these issues and want to address them. 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 experts helping with autonomous living could help with dignified aging.

ECPM strongly advocates for palliative care as the option for end-of-life stage. Ending life when it is 'not worthy to live' is not an option to us, as life is given and created by God. Having a robust social network, customized care, life-coaches for mental health and quality palliative care means life can be dignified until the end.

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

RELATIONAL ECONOMY

ECPM believes that the purpose of all economic activity is to support life and advance wellbeing for all. We believe that business initiative and ownership empower people. We encourage the development of small and medium-sized companies (counting for two thirds of private sector jobs in the EU) and a focus on an investment-friendly climate for innovative entrepreneurs.

ECPM believes that globalization has many positive aspects, but it is not by definition a good development. We are 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. A growing world population and a growing world economy has consequences for our planet. If we want to leave this planet in a good shape for our children and grandchildren, then we must take responsibility now. This means that the EU and its Members need to act now to reduce pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and to invest in sustainable energy sources.

THE END OF THE STATUS QUO AND THE ROAD AHEAD

The large, mainstream political parties have a vested interest to maintain the economic status quo because they are part of it. Usually, those with financial power also have political power and influence. 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.

ECPM wishes to see and is working towards a real reform of the system, one which leads to change for all stakeholders in the economy, including financial markets, shareholders and multinationals. We were glad to see a small step in this direction by ending the practice of tax avoidance by the capital-holding stakeholders in the economy. Ending tax avoidance is a positive development but its scale and origins are signs that the problem often does not lie with those who have less power and little access to capital. EU policies that encourage further concentration of capital and power therefore need to be rejected.

We see a need for a broad and inclusive stakeholder-based way of thinking about economy in which future reforms can be embedded. In this regard the environment has to be understood as the bedrock on which all stakeholders depend. Therefore, improving and maintaining our environment is included in this understanding of a stakeholder economy.

ECPM has a relational view of our economy and a mutual approach to economic policies. Mutuality is creating shared value for all stakeholders through a form of capitalism combined with responsible government and business behaviour. The goal of a mutual EU is to see wellbeing in much broader terms than profits for shareholders. It means doing well financially by doing good. Economy should be much more about finding sustainable responses and solutions to demands and challenges. The basic EU economic policy should be not about scarcity, but about mutuality, to promote the life of creation.

We advocate for economic policies which take into account their impact on relationships between peoples, between institutions, between stakeholder groups, and between individuals. A principal test for policies would therefore be not just their economic, social or environmental effects but whether they can be expected to produce greater interaction and mutual understanding, fairness to all included parts, and a convergence of purpose and values.

A number of key goals for EU and national economic policy can be derived from this approach to economy. Economic policy should strive for an economy that:

- is people-centred, and not financially-centred;
- applies the potential of technology by respecting human dignity;
- insists on transparency;

- cultivates long- term thinking;
- is as inclusive as possible (does not cave to pressure from vested interests at the expense of other stakeholders);
- does not erode the rule of law and democracy.

GOALS FOR REFORMING EUROPEAN ECONOMIES

The principles outlined above are all core issues of any economic development. It is impossible to maintain a sustainable economy without interaction, mutual understanding and fairness. Based on these principles, a few policy recommendations can be put forward for both the EU and member states.

At EU level:

- 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 CAP¹ 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;
- end the EU drive for privatisation of public services and leave this to the member states;
- increase the support of and spread of 'green technologies';
- make integrated reporting the European standard for corporates, and introduce metrics that directly measure relationship quality between stakeholders.

¹ CAP- Common Agriculture Policy

At Member State level:

- restore the trust between governments and electorates by requiring inter-generational fiscal transparency;
- address excessive national debt as a matter of urgency;
- remove tax advantages to debt finance in the corporate sector;
- charge banks adequately for the liquidity and solvency insurance they receive from government and the ECB²;
- develop new financial institutions to finance house purchase through shared equity arrangements, and remove any remaining tax breaks for mortgage debt;
- incentivize lender care by banks, retailers and other lenders by removing tax allowances for defaults on their consumer loans;
- reduce the impact of international indebtedness in cases of severe economic crisis by converting conventional debt into GDP-linked securities;
- strengthen shareholder oversight of corporate management by requiring transparency of share ownership, by deferring aspects of director remuneration, and by incentivizing investors to be long-term and involved;
- rebalance the risk between stakeholders by requiring stronger representation of stakeholder interests on company boards and, in liquidation proceedings, prioritizing small creditors, customers, suppliers and employees over secured creditors.

INNOVATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

We live in an era of rapid change. ECPM believes that God himself has given mankind the mandate to develop and take care of His Creation (Genesis 2:15), and as such we need to be aware and involved in the conversation about technology, AI, bio-ethics etc. Innovation is not a neutral subject and requires careful and ethical arguments about what are desirable directions to move forward and which directions to avoid.

Innovation is, besides being attractive for making life easier or simpler, also a powerful disruptive force for the status quo. To name just one example: taxi drivers fear for their future, not in the first place because of new types of taxi services like Uber, but because of the development of self-driving vehicles, making their job no longer relevant. As such, innovation is sometimes not a pleasant process for citizens and established companies, as it distorts the market and prevents them from doing “business as usual”. Not surprisingly, many such companies or large organizations will try to lobby governments, in order to block such disrupting innovations from entering the market. Even though ECPM values freedom of opinion and expression, it is wary of voices claiming that innovation will lead to loss of jobs and mass unemployment. History has shown that new jobs (and usually better ones) will appear after obsolete industries disappear, as long as there is investment in promising new technologies and support for people who wish to re-train or to start their own business.

Why should governments invest in innovation?

ECPM believes Europe should further strengthen 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 OECD³ average⁴, despite sustained efforts by the EU.

Government funding can help with developing desired technologies in order to facilitate sustainable development. It can directly set up innovation incubators or fund labs and projects via higher education institutes, whether public or private. The government’s main task in fostering innovation communities is to remove barriers, either bureaucratic procedures or excessive taxation. Scientists report spending up to 30% of their work hours on acquiring funding⁵, and they look at low acceptance percentages for their proposals. This is an enormous waste of energy and resources. Because of the current intellectual property laws and protection provided, government rules and regulations rather hinder innovation in the sector than stimulate it.

² ECB- European Central Bank

³ OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=R%26D_expenditure&oldid=551418

⁵ <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/5-tips-to-find-funding-for-your-research>

Leaving R&D completely to the market is risky as large corporations' only interest is maximising profits. For example, large oil and mining companies would, by definition, have a conflict of interest when doing research on energy-saving technology or when they "support" the transition towards sustainable energy. It is just rhetoric and maybe some corporate social responsibility projects to appease critics, but in the end, it is the profit maximization and the expected shareholder value that is the decisive factor in the decision-making process. Pharmaceutical organizations are another example. The current strict interpretation of patents on medicine gives these companies the opportunity to gain a large gross profit margin. Tax relief for money invested in research & development in companies may incentivize the private sector in designating larger amounts of funds towards product and service development.

What areas should governments invest in?

As seen in the previous section, because of the disruptive force of innovation, a conflict of interest can occur within established businesses, leading to the abandonment or the blocking of the development of (especially) capital-intensive innovations. However, in Europe (as well as other countries), there are many creative and enterprising people who would like to build their own company and bring new inventions on the market. Offering these entrepreneurs support in terms of coaching and facilities is crucial to help them survive and grow, diversify the market and prevent monopolies. Disruptive start-ups like Tesla have thoroughly changed the automobile industry worldwide and have led to a large increase in the research into electric cars. Companies like Uber and Google have made the existing automobile industry consider investing in cars with self-driving capacities as well. Established companies who fail to understand the disruptive power of innovation lose ground or simply disappear. Examples of such companies well known: Nokia and Polaroid to name just two.

Considering this, ECPM supports investment by the EU in facilitating "innovative entrepreneurship", as it will strengthen Europe as an innovative continent. Besides the potential benefits for the economy, budget-wise it is much less costly to invest in entrepreneurship than to create special economic zones to attract large multinationals with all kinds of tax breaks, leading to a so-called "race to the bottom" an undesired competition between European countries and/or regions.

Next to supporting innovative start-ups with breakthrough technologies, the national and/or regional governments are the ideal actors in society to define some key technology areas in which they would like to invest. Different approaches for identifying these key technology areas can be (and are already) used within several regions of Europe. One of these is the "cluster approach", where existing strong business clusters are helped to become even more innovative and competitive worldwide by government investments in R&D. The role of the EU is to facilitate the national and regional governments by suggesting complementary technology areas across different national borders. It is also evident that national borders (and sometimes European ones as well) have no meaning for high tech start-ups. Their market is worldwide from the beginning.

Even though innovation has its basis in creativity, which means that there are only limited possibilities to steer it into a certain direction, still ECPM would like the EU to formulate a "desired direction" for innovation. Several global organizations have issued such desired direction of policies (for example the Millennium Goals of the UN or the desire to have a substantial decrease of CO2 emissions by 2050) and they fund initiatives matching these ideas. Based on the Biblical principles of developing and taking care of the Creation, ECPM believes there is certainly room for a "desired direction approach", next to the aforementioned "innovative entrepreneurship support approach" and "cluster approach". This would mean a substantial increase in funding for different research & development initiatives related to sustainable energy, building and production technologies, in order to make the economy greener. Of course, innovation is done on a micro-level of individual companies in their own regions in which they are located, but the EU can play a major role in harmonizing rules and regulations for innovative technologies between member states. It can also fund certain targeted green initiatives and support member states in the formulation of their own technology policy, complementary to that of other member states.

How to make innovation work in Europe?

ECPM supports the EU's recommendations for member states to raise the average education level of the European citizens, as higher education and innovation go hand in hand. This is, in our opinion, the only sustainable way out of economic crises and it can substantially improve the economies of especially Southern Europe, where the economy is in many cases still dependent on commodity goods. Lacking innovation and only focussing on improving economic efficiency is not an option for European countries, as the limited size of the population and relatively high wages will severely limit the possibilities to create economies of scale in traditional industrial production.

Another aspect of building an innovative society has to do with the quality of the government. It can be observed in many countries that a highly bureaucratic or corrupt government can severely hinder the work of innovative entrepreneurs. Fortunately, most of the national governments of the European member-states have a good track record in terms of governmental accountability. In cases where this is not so, ECPM supports any strong EU policies to crack down on corrupt behaviour, especially on existing patron-client relations, oligarchic tendencies, bribery and nepotism which are very detrimental to the general competitiveness of regions and countries in the long run.

SUSTAINABILITY, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE

A European single market means that there needs to be a level playing field and a set of rules acceptable for all stakeholders. On the matter of sustainability, industry and agriculture of EU member states, things are clearly interdependent. Climate change is a phenomenon that we must deal with together. Food safety requires solid rules (as well as enforcement and monitorization) regarding agriculture and fisheries. Some member states are more dependent on agriculture while others have a more industrial economy. Balanced and fair rules are needed, and so far, the EU has made a positive contribution on these aspects.

Sustainability

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. If we want the next generation to have a better future, we need to act now. Although member states have responsibilities of their own, ECPM believes that the EU can be a driving force for a sustainable Europe.

The EU can decide on goals for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions such as CO₂, for energy saving and for renewable energy. The market for clean energy needs to reflect the current technological possibilities as well as respecting the principles of fair market competition. It should assist member states to meet these standards and to invest in innovative economies. Aviation and seafaring in Europe need to have objective and ambitious emission reduction goals. Reasonable subsidies for innovative methods and cleaner energy, industry and agriculture are needed to speed up the process towards less pollution. Innovative and green technologies should be supported, and sustainable agriculture needs to be rewarded.

Agriculture and fishery

Agriculture is financially 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).⁶ However, further reform of the CAP is needed in order to meet key objectives and face future challenges. ECPM wants these reforms to aim at the goals and not focus on specific methods. There needs to be freedom for member states to decide how to reform their agricultural sector. This, however, does not mean that the EU should discontinue any support for European farmers which enables them to deliver quality products for competitive prices. ECPM is in favour of such support but believes it should not come with conditions that would push the reforms in a certain direction, pre-determined by the EU. The farmer is vital in any effort to make agriculture more sustainable and innovative. Food safety is observed by ECPM as one of the primary goals. Circumstances for European farmers are very different in every region. The methods and tools used by farmers in Eastern Europe differ sometimes from the ones in Western Europe due to finance or culture. This produces sometimes a discrepancy in product quality and quantity. EU agricultural subsidies can also be used to level the playing field, making fair competition possible.

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,

⁶ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27_en

which ECPM supports. However, a 2020 analysis⁷ 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.

ECPM also wants a simplification of the current rules related to fishery. In some circumstances around 90 different pieces of legislation apply. Too many rules increase the gap between legislators in Brussels and fishermen and moreover, make it difficult for fishermen to do their work. Once again ECPM believes that clear principles with a basic legislation framework are more effective than an overload of rules and regulations. One measure that should be withdrawn directly is the discard ban which is not benefiting fishermen in the North Sea, nor benefiting sustainable fishery in any way.

As international waters often border several countries, it is very important that those countries (EU member state or not) make agreements in line with the main EU rules and principles. Regionalisation is not nationalisation; it means including *all* important stakeholders in the discussion. As part of the UK withdrawal deal, fish stocks jointly managed by the EU and the UK are considered shared resources under international law. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the two parties sets out the terms under which the EU and the UK determine their respective fishing rights in the Atlantic and North Sea.⁸ Under the TCA, both parties agree to hold annual talks with a view to determining catch limits and quotas for the following year.

Industry & transportation

ECPM believes that the EU has a role to play related to industry: we want the European institutions to advocate green sustainable industries, encourage innovation and to make sure that the polluter pays. Outside of those areas, the role of the EU should be minor. As pollution does not stop at the border, the main role for the EU is to make sure that all EU members are encouraged to foster clean and green industries.

Transport, however, is an area in which the role of the EU is important, as it plays a major role in the trade within the EU. These are some improvements we believe are necessary to create a properly functioning European transport area. First, smooth and high-quality options for transport across Europe are beneficial for all EU members and citizens. This means that the EU could help to clear cross-border bottlenecks or provide clear legal frameworks that would make it easier for personnel or modalities to operate across Europe. Secondly, fair working conditions are important, and the current legislation needs to be enforced better. Not all legislation is equally enforced across Europe, particularly related to road transport. A third factor is the issue of unfair competition. It could be the case that state aid is given to certain players, that huge tax deductions are given, or that certain secondary costs are paid for by governments. This is especially the case in aviation, where European carriers must deal with heavily subsidized Middle Eastern carriers that flood the European market. The EU should act to counter this. Europe is a free market, even for players outside the continent, but above all it must be a fair market.

Finally, ECPM wants the European parliament and national parliaments to critically review European rules and oversight. Not all centralisation and uniformization is good or really solving a problem. ECPM is against creating new European agencies to deal with “new” problems. Subsidiarity still applies, also in transport. EU member states should have their own policies for what transport modality they favour or what infrastructure they build. Member states should be able to create policy frameworks for their main ports. They should refrain, however, from illegally subsidizing their main ports because this is unfair competition.

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

ECPM considers protection of environment a very important policy issue of the EU. Ever since the beginning of the EU this policy was recognized, and its importance has only grown. We play the greatest role in the negative effects on the environment and therefore, we play a crucial role in protecting and preserving it. Nature can grow even without us but without nature we cannot live. We have the responsibility to protect the environment not only for the sake of it but for the sake of our current and future generations. This responsibility must be fulfilled by each person individually, but the state is a driving force in creating the right circumstances and providing the right tools for this to happen.

⁷ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2021/03/lessons-from-implementation-of-the-eus-common-fisheries-policy>

⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/22/council-approves-eu-uk-fishing-deal-for-2023/>

The EU in collaboration with the member states should continually look for ways to protect the environment in a manner that does not hamper technological innovation. It is not an either/or situation, ECPM believes that technological innovation can be used to protect the environment, minimize the negative effects caused by us 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 Paris Convention aimed at protecting the environment is a very good initiative but not enough. Even though the convention is not signed by all states in the world, every country has the responsibility to respect the directives of this convention because the health and existence of present and future generations is at stake. Environment can only be protected if everybody works together at an international, national, local and individual level.

HEALTHY FAMILIES

Healthy families are the basis for thriving societies. We believe that stable, loving relationships between parents are crucial for the wellbeing of their children. Marriage can be the best guarantee for enduring relationships. ECPM recognizes the family as the most important social entity, preceding the state and any other community or group. ECPM calls on the European Union to respect the sovereignty of the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman. ECPM is also weary of the political focus on the 'autonomous individual' as it is promoted by secular ideologies. We believe that the quality of life of a human being depends on the quality of his relations with others and the strongest and earliest connection in life is the family.

FAMILY & SOCIETY

The family, being the most important social and relational entity where life starts, precedes the state and any other community or group. The family is a micro-society where elementary skills and experiences are being conveyed. Healthy families lead to a healthy society and therefore, values which are essential for a healthy family – love, solidarity, willingness to sacrifice for other people, faithfulness - should be promoted in public sphere, especially via educational policies. Many people find it hard to enter committed family relationships. This is why ECPM promotes policies which will increase the capability of individuals to create and live in lifelong devoted relationships – in marriage and family. We are aware that we do not live in a perfect world. Today more and more families are in crisis. We value counselling and are standing firm for the rights of children in case relationships are ending. ECPM respects the sovereignty of the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, and recognizes its inherent rights that are inalienable. The family is not a mere collection of individuals and therefore legislation based solely on the individual will eventually collide with the rights of the family. We believe that societies that are rooted in strong families are more relational, compassionate and sustainable. 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 principles of subsidiarity, the European institutions should not interfere in family policies of member states. However, there are areas related to family issues where the EU has the power to legislate, as for example labour laws. ECPM believes that the European Union should exercise power in these areas carefully, fully respecting the opinions of the member states. We believe that the EU should refrain from taking any initiatives in family policy or proposing legislation that goes against or over national legislation of member states or pushing for alternative family forms.

On a national level, ECPM through its members promotes policies supporting parenthood and creating conditions that are conducive to child-raising. The recognition of the family in all policies is the most basic step forward to work on the improvement of the quality of family life and the cornerstone for the wellbeing of our societies. We state that this recognition must grow in national, regional and local political bodies. Therefore, a legal framework that supports an active family-friendly work environment, is of crucial relevance and shall be pursued at the national political levels in Europe.

As ECPM, we firmly believe that the policies fostering reconciliation between qualifications, labour market participation and family life affect positively the economic growth in the long run. Men and women 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 forms of employment are essential, in our opinion. This applies to maternity care as well. ECPM is positive about any endeavours of the member states to reconcile work and private life. Investing in children is investing in the future, and parents who invest in their children therefore invest in society. Parents should not be financially punished for taking responsibility to raise their children. Parents' reconciliation of work with other family obligations is strongly influenced by the characteristics of childcare provision. While some form of childcare services is indispensable, we stress the importance of care in a family context, especially for young families since parental care during childhood is essential for child development.

The right conditions are especially important for the single parents who have less income and cannot share the time for childcare and household tasks. Thus, flexibility and space for part-time jobs, enough maternity or

parental leave and childcare opportunities within companies, job sharing, annual working time and sabbatical leaves are examples of proven successful family policies.

We recognize the particular vulnerability of low-skilled people who need to support their family. This is compounded by the fact that automatization is set to replace many of the low-skilled jobs. It cannot be denied 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. All people are able to deliver a valuable contribution to society and both European as well as national and regional policies should be aimed at such. ECPM does not believe in “lost cases” and discourages migration out of poverty or necessity from Central/Eastern Europe to Western Europe. We believe that has a large, negative impact on the members of the families left behind. Building a more innovative economy is the best way forward to prevent this from happening.

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.

FREEDOM, SECURITY AND STABILITY

Real freedom of faith, conscience and expression only becomes visible through relations with those who feel, think or act differently. ECPM believes that an extreme political correctness fuelled by aggressive secularism is a danger for real freedom and real plurality. In this sense, there must be a fundamental freedom to disagree with the view of the majority on any subject. ECPM is also worried by the lack of freedom of religion in many parts of the world. This is clear to see in Islamic countries but also countries like India and China. The European Union and its Members should promote a culture of freedom and forcefully support those who defend and promote freedom in their country or region. Regarding the rise of extremist Islamic groups like ISIS it is the view of ECPM that this organization has proven to be a direct threat to European security and therefore the EU and its Members should take action to completely remove ISIS from Syria, Iraq and any other places where it might resurge.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The ECPM approach to foreign affairs is based on the Christian understanding of human dignity. This means that every human being is equally valuable regardless of ethnicity or gender. 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 for 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. In this regard it is important that in our policies we apply the same principles at home and abroad. Fundamental freedoms cannot be separated from another as each freedom supports the others 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. The EEAS⁹ is not to develop an EU Foreign Affairs policy but should reduce its role to primarily supporting the spread of human dignity and fundamental freedoms abroad. It can do so by engaging with state-actors and non-state actors and implement programs for that goal.

The EEAS High Representative should no longer represent the EU in third countries, but this should be done (when necessary) by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the EU member state holding the Presidency of the EU. The EEAS should support policies which are determined by joint decision of the member states demanding for a common approach in facing a common challenge.

The aftermath of the refugee crisis which started in 2016 has opened up some fundamental debates about migration, about economic stability and about solidarity among EU member states. However, there is still a tendency to treat foreign affairs as a separate issue from internal challenges, to silo and compartmentalize the issues, which is not wise. For example, in the aftermath of terrorist attacks by ISIS there was a lot of attention on internal security cooperation and very little attention to the war against ISIS in its strongholds and coordination centres in Syria. In migration policy there is a lot of concern for the integration of minority communities in Europe but not for ways the cultural mentality of these communities is shaped by forces from outside Europe. However, this influence from outside on the mentality of communities in Europe is a major factor in their integration. If countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia were to implement universal fundamental freedoms and if these freedoms found root in their societies it would not only bring development, but also greatly diminish the integration challenges in Europe. It is the most straightforward way in dealing with Islam fundamentalism by supporting a culture that will no longer be a breeding ground for terrorism.

Integration policies should be designed with a great understanding of those cultural features and developments in MENA & Central Asia which prevent integration. These policies should deal with those blockades in such a way that human dignity and fundamental freedoms are secured and promoted. Clarity and practice of this in the EU member states will also influence the 'homeland cultures' via the many family ties.

⁹ EEAS- European External Action Service

We believe the EU member states need to engage much stronger with all political and society actors in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and Central Asia that support and implement fundamental freedoms such as freedom of religion, equality of women, freedom of expression and democratic multi-ethnic governance. Every region and nation in MENA & Central Asia that implements these freedoms in a substantial way should get preferential treatment by the EU member states.

The ECPM supports Israel, advocates for its security and is clear on Israel's right to exist.

The EU member states should cooperate in not allowing foreign states or entities to be or to become a threat to fundamental freedoms of citizens or residents of EU member states. The current war of aggression started by Russia in Ukraine is unjustified, reprehensible and it constitutes a threat also for EU member states like Poland, Romania or the Baltic countries. We call for immediate cease of violence and hostilities and for all parties involved to seek peace and reconciliation.

Concerning refugees, we believe that the human dignity of the refugee should be protected. The focus should lie on a procedure as short as possible and to ensure that the refugee has shelter, food and can integrate into society as soon as possible. Churches and NGOs should be encouraged to assist in the last part. Refugees and migrants coming to any EU member state need first and foremost education in our understanding of human dignity, fundamental freedoms and equality of men and women. These values should be presented as non-negotiable and as conditions for acceptance in the EU member state. The refugee status should be revoked in case of gross violations.

Forced marriage is a serious threat for many young girls in Europe and has often strong ties with the homeland of a community in which forced marriage is present at a higher-than-average level. Forced marriage should be treated and penalized as human trafficking and in doing so supporting the integration of the whole community.

Sharia law and other practices that violate human dignity should not be allowed in any EU member state and where needed the countries of origin should be informed that EU member states do not allow their citizens to be treated elsewhere in a way that violates their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Entities supported by third countries that promote a message of hate and/or a message that runs counter to fundamental and constitutional equality and freedoms need to be discouraged to maintain or develop a presence in EU member states.

SECURITY

The European cooperation between member states in the field of security should centre on 4 areas: military co-operation, border security, cyber security, and anti-terrorism.

Military co-operation

ECPM strongly believes that all European military co-operation can be best 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. The EU member states may display different interests and levels of development but there is one thing that European nations share with each other which we do not share with other NATO members/partners: the continent of Europe and its security and stability.

This very important shared European interest does not mean that we believe the EU should have the authority over (European) or even integrated armed forces. The EU has the principle of subsidiarity in place and all measures, agreements and working plans should be seen from this perspective. In this light, defence matters fall under the ultimate 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 very nature of EU member states and the EU itself. Subsidiarity in defence and security matters is best explained by one of the founding fathers of the EU, Robert Schuman:

"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.”

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 defence industrial groups which would have profits as their priority, not the security of the peoples of Europe.

Cooperation should be focused on defensive measures which are in the interest of all. The aim of defence cooperation between member states should be to create more affordability and make technical cooperation possible. It can be achieved by harmonizing equipment and tools so there is interchangeability, by training together and standardizing procedures and operations. Money should not be invested, however, in development of new European-wide military equipment like tanks, fighter aircraft and so on.

Border security

The Schengen agreement is a part of the European cooperation which has positive and visible effects on the citizens of European countries: traveling, working and trading freely within the union. But the lack of internal borders also creates some vulnerabilities. The member countries forming the external border of the Union have a bigger responsibility and burden than the interior countries do. The obvious and just thing to do is to increase support for the border countries, either financially or in terms of personnel. Since the control of the external borders is of great importance for all countries involved, it shouldn't be the sole responsibility of the border country. We propose that the European Commission and the EEAS take a firmer stance when the coastal waters or airspace of the border countries is violated, as that affects all Europeans.

Cyber security

Europe in the 21st century is completely dependent on data and communication networks. Attacks on governmental, economic and (civil) electronic infrastructure can have severe consequences on our societies, considering how integrated our systems are already. The EU network is as strong as its weakest link: if one of the poorly protected networks is infiltrated, it will spread to all. Cyberthreats against our societies and infrastructure could come from state- and 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.

We are concerned to see that many times 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 Estonia¹⁰ is practicing.

ECPM believes that all EU member states need their own cyber units, which should be interconnected. If strong nations work together to create a strong union also in the field of cyber security then that will benefit us all.

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 that respects 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.

There is an urgent need to reassess all aid programs and other support given to entities outside the EU and third countries in order to ensure that no funding ends up in the hands of extremists. European presence via 'front organisations' of entities that support extremist groups/ ideology needs to be countered and ended.

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 in the field of 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

¹⁰ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/estonia/11564163/Estonia-recruits-volunteer-army-of-cyber-warriors.html>

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.

FIGHTING MODERN SLAVERY

Modern slavery is a dehumanizing act that reduces people to trading objects. 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; the EU and its members must act now. 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.¹¹

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)¹² 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.

Policy suggestions on forced labour

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, should be held accountable in case of human rights abuses in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.¹³ It doesn't matter if the abuses take place in Europe or in other parts of the world. In cooperation with the member states, the EU could compile a list of companies which do not comply with member state legislation against forced labour. If their non-compliance is systematic, then they could face an EU-wide ban in the trading of their goods.

At EU level, the proposed Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence¹⁴ 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

¹¹ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

¹² <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23682>

¹³ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1145

will enable them to formalize the employment of domestic workers. An example can be the employment cheques that have already been introduced in different member states.

As far as the protection of unaccompanied children in Europe is concerned, we firmly believe that the EU member states should cooperate on strengthening child protection systems where the child's best interests should be considered, regardless of their status. The care that refugee minors receive in the refugee reception centres is a key factor in their long-term adjustment and should be regulated at the national level. ECPM suggests that the action at the European level should be complementary to the member states' measures which should ensure that any child needing protection receives it and that, regardless of their immigration status, citizenship or background, all children are treated as children first and foremost.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

According to the third report¹⁵ (2020) on the implementation of the 2011 Anti-trafficking Directive, 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 2020 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, Luxembourg, 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).¹⁶ 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 favours.

The countries which decriminalized prostitution have witnessed many negative implications in the safety and the wellbeing of women as well as an increase in human trafficking. The Netherlands was the first European country to legalize prostitution. The declared aim of the legalization of prostitution was the protection and safety of those involved, especially women. However, under legalization, trafficking increased and women continued to be abused and degraded¹⁷. Following the example of the Netherlands, the German government passed a law in 2002 which decriminalized prostitution. This law led to a spike in the number of people practicing prostitution in the country. A German government report on this law concluded that this law did not make the sex industry safer for women.¹⁸ Another analysis for a cross-section of 150 countries found that legalizing prostitution leads to an expansion of the market and increases human trafficking.¹⁹ After these disappointing results, the German government passed a new law in 2016 which punishes those who purchase sex from known victims of sexual exploitation with imprisonment up to 5 years.

On the other hand, the countries that followed the Nordic Model witnessed some positive results. A report²⁰ by the Swedish Ministry of Justice on the effects of the 1999 Swedish law on prostitution in the country showed that between 1998 and 2008 the levels of street prostitution in Sweden have fallen by half. At the same time, other forms of prostitution (like for example prostitution through the internet) did not increase. This means that the implementation of the law led to a genuine decrease in prostitution. Moreover, according to the Swedish police, this law acts as a barrier to human traffickers who are planning to be established in Sweden. Demand for prostitution decreased mainly because of fear of penalties. Similar results have been reported in Northern Ireland, France and the Republic of Ireland.

At EU level, the PACE report²¹ adopted in 2014 titled "*Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery in Europe*" calls for the banning of the advertising of sexual services, including forms of disguised advertising and recognized

¹⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0661&qid=1686479907090>

¹⁶ [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)

¹⁷ <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/the-failure-of-legalization-of-prostitution-in-the-netherlands/>

¹⁸ <https://www.cahr.uni-osnabrueck.de/reddot/BroschuereProstGenglisch.pdf>

¹⁹ https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/45198/1/Neumayer_Legalized_Prostitution_Increase_2012.pdf

²⁰ https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/1049_swedish_prostitution_summary_original.pdf

²¹ <https://pace.coe.int/pdf/87d846fdefbe14cf7cdd6b0e5df435981c4734e623d9cc6d3957000e53bcc386/res.%201983.pdf>

banning the purchase of sexual services as the “*most effective tool for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings*”. The report also insisted on setting up exit programmes, coupled with comprehensive legal assistance, mental and healthcare services, housing support, training and employment services and education. The most important piece of legislation continues to be the 2011/36/EU Directive on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.²² Article 26 of the anti-trafficking Directive requires member states to criminalize the use of sexual services with the knowledge that the person is a victim of human trafficking. The above-mentioned report on the implementation of the Directive points to the fact that human trafficking and exploitation is on the rise, despite the various measures in place and progress on transnational cooperation. It points to technology being used more and to a sophistication of recruiting and enslaving. The rate of convictions remains low across all member states. The report also highlights the fact that when victims receive assistance and protection, their specific needs and circumstances are not taken into account. Finally, data collecting and reporting remains inconsistent and insufficient.

ECPM believes that discouraging the demand by making the client liable in line with reports by the European Parliament and the PACE as well as the 2011 EU Directive is the best way to combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation. We call for the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services across the entire Europe, following the examples of Sweden, France, Ireland and Northern Ireland. ECPM believes that a ban on advertising of sexual services is feasible at an EU level.

We urge member states to fully and unconditionally implement the 2011 Directive as a minimal way of combating sexual exploitation. Additionally, we encourage member states to implement awareness programs through the media and school education and to urgently set up exit programmes for those wishing to leave prostitution, complete with comprehensive care and services. We call for tailored, specific training in sensitization for law enforcement officials, the judiciary, social workers and public health professionals coming in direct contact with victims. The sharing of best practices among member states on prevention and exit programmes should be enhanced, regardless of the position of each member state on the issue of the criminalization of prostitution.

²² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:101:0001:0011:en:PDF>

REFORMING THE EUROPEAN UNION

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 accumulated 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. In order to win back support for a different and better EU we need a more realistic and constructive rhetoric. This means more freedom for member states and a stronger focus of the EU on key matters like food safety, energy safety, fair competition and cross border problems like immigration, rapid climate change, security and terrorism.

ECPM sees the EU as an instrument of peace, like the founding fathers envisioned it. Through cooperation we secure peace for our citizens, stability, economic growth and cultural exchange. Together, in our diversity, we are stronger and better equipped to face challenges. The roots of the European Union can be read the best from the preamble of the European Coal and Steel Agreement (ECSA), the precursor to the European Union. The ECSA was motivated to “*help, by expanding basic production, to raise the standard of living and further the works of peace*” and to “*substitute age-old rivalries by merging of their essential interests; to create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts*”²³. Robert Schuman, who first proposed the European Coal and Steel Community, was convinced that Europe was “*deeply rooted in Christian values*”.

The phrase “*ever closer union*” was introduced by the writers of the Treaty of Rome. Based on the ECSA, the writers imagined a willing convergence between the peoples of Europe, not a fusion of the political and financial structures within the European Union.

ECPM believes we need to reform and remind the EU of its roots. We call the European Union to return to its spiritual, cultural and civilizational roots and core motivation, to not focus on more Europe, but on a better Europe. Less regulation and legislation is needed whereas core values and principles should be strengthened. Principles as subsidiarity, solidarity, and diversity should be leading together with values as freedom, stewardship, responsibility and human dignity.

We believe more control should be returned to national parliaments, which would increase their responsibility at the same time. The citizens would stop feeling uneasy and antagonistic towards Brussels if they felt their representatives and governments have a bigger role and that decision-making is closer to them.

We advocate for a European Community instead of a Union, which means withdrawing the right of initiative of the European Commission (EC). It should retain this right only in those areas where the EU has full competence: international trade, fair competition within EU, monetary issues related to the Eurozone and the customs union. Apart from these areas, the EC should have a directing and coordinating function on the initiatives of the member states. The European Council and Council of the Europe would review and check the work of the EC. This limiting of competencies would also mean decreasing the budget for the European administration. The European Union would be most effective as facilitator and orchestrator on subjects like energy safety and (border) security. On these matters, the member states need to show solidarity and a constructive attitude.

ECPM also 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 will be key.

The role of national parliaments needs to be reinvigorated. Any decision that would strip member states of their sovereignty would have to be accepted by at least 2/3 majorities in national parliaments. The ‘red card’ procedure²⁴ should be altered to become a real and effective check of national parliaments. If 50% of national parliaments disagree with EU legislation than this legislation should be revoked automatically. This will

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:11951K:EN:PDF>

²⁴ <https://fullfact.org/europe/explaining-eu-deal-red-card/>

encourage national parliaments to safeguard the basic principles of the EU, the competences and the subsidiarity principle.

A one-size-fits-all approach might have made sense when the project started with six countries, it is not viable anymore when there are twenty-seven countries. 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*”.²⁵ Currently the twenty-seven members are all part of the single market, twenty- three are also in Schengen, twenty-six in the banking union, nineteen in the Eurozone. Instead of pushing for all countries to join all entities, a realistic and constructive view needs to be taken. The eurozone has proven not to be beneficial for all its members because of the diversity in economies that it represents. Furthermore, countries like Romania and Bulgaria are not part of the Schengen zone because of serious doubts from the other members about their ability to protect and secure the outer border of the EU.

Therefore, diversity is already a reality. Instead of institutionally combating it and insisting on uniformity, we believe a confederal structure would provide the space and flexibility for a better European Union. Member states can act more effectively together on issues of economic divergence if their economies are more similar and their preferences not adversative. States forming smaller 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).

ECPM is also keen on the elimination of European entities or agencies that have no added value and operate outside the EU competencies or infringe on national competences. For example, the Economic and Social Committee as well as the Committee of Regions can be removed. We also recommend enhanced scrutiny of new agencies popping up without a clear goal or use. Criteria for European agencies should be subsidiarity, economics, and pan-European cooperation.

EU NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY OVER EU ACCESSION

We encourage the European Union to offer partnerships 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 applauds 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 criteria²⁶ 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 as freedom of press, freedom of religion and protection for minorities.

However, the EU has a special bond with its direct neighbours in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, countries which belong to the EU Neighbourhood Policy. The EU should continue helping these countries as many of them are in the long-term moving towards possible membership. Special focus should be on development of democracy, rule of law and cross-border cooperation, while fully respecting the values and integrity of the neighbouring countries.

LEGISLATION REVIEW

To keep this EU flexible, diverse and effective, it is important to monitor applicability and necessity of all EU treaties, directives and guidelines. ECPM suggests to periodically review EU treaties and guidelines and decide if they need to be continued, amended or removed. Every ten years the European Council and European Parliament should ‘dust off’ all existing legislation. EU directives which do not really solve or address a problem under European competence should be withdrawn. A concrete example of this is the controversial Equal

²⁵ <https://sallux.eu/products/confederal-europe.html>

²⁶ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/accession-criteria_en

Treatment Directive²⁷ which creates more problems and ambiguities than it solves as it mixes real problems and ideological issues.

The funding of ideological lobbies by the EU should also be reviewed. Abortion and embryonic research are not EU competences, yet the European institutions openly fund and favour these initiatives, often against the explicit will of EU citizens. 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.

Finally, a realistic view on the EU means having a backup plan in case the initial one fails. The Brexit vote of 2016 and subsequent anti-EU national elections protest votes made it clear that we need exit strategies in place. Too often EU officials and pro-European leaders naively dismiss questions about worst case scenarios with “that will not happen.” We believe we cannot afford that luxury anymore; we need to have worst case scenarios and exit criteria for the EU, for Schengen and for the Eurozone.

²⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006L0054&qid=1686746032780>

HONOURING EU'S CHRISTIAN ROOTS

We believe key teachings of Christianity such as freedom, love, truth, reconciliation and solidarity are 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.²⁸

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 experience 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 15.²⁹ 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 studies³⁰ 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. 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.

The European institutions have recently accepted – at least in words – the need for the EU to protect Freedom of Religion or Belief around the world. Following pressure from the European Parliament and civil society, the Council of the EU adopted in 2013 several guidelines³¹ “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

²⁸ www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>

³⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2020/11/10/harassment-of-religious-groups-continues-to-be-reported-in-more-than-90-of-countries/>

³¹ www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/137585.pdf

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 report³² 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.

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. It is useful to note that other 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 will 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 with Proposal for a Council Directive on "implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation" that was finally not adopted. Had this problematic piece of legislation come into force, it would have infringed on the principle of subsidiarity by depriving member states of the power to regulate the business sector and would have limited both the freedom of contract (which represents the basis of civil law) and personal autonomy. Finally, it would have had negative implications on freedom of religion or belief in Europe by not allowing citizens to refuse to provide goods and services if doing so would be a direct violation of their reasonably held religious beliefs. Therefore, this Directive would have created moral conflicts for religious believers, by forcing them to choose between their business and their belief.

The PACE report on "*Tackling Intolerance and Discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians*" 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 some member states are harassed while publicly promoting and defending religious values, including traditional marriage. There were incidents where Christians have been investigated, suspended, or dismissed from work for wearing religious symbols publicly. On other occasions, registrars were dismissed from their employment for refusing to issue same-sex marriage certificates. Finally, the report referred to limitations put in some European countries on the right of parents to opt their child out of individual classes or an entire course which the parents deem contrary to their religious, moral, and ethical beliefs. In some European countries, private schools with a special faith-based ethos find it difficult to maintain a certain level of autonomy as regards the pedagogical content and the choice of teachers. This right to education according to one's beliefs is 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. A 2017 report³³ of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on "*The protection of the rights of parents and children belonging to religious minorities*" made special reference to many instances when this right was not respected

³² <https://www.religiousfreedom.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Intergroup-FoRB-Report-Final-2021.pdf>

³³ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23719>

among Council of Europe member states. It also underlined the effect of several cases across Europe where children belonging to religious minorities have been taken into custody by child protection agencies. Christian doctors who do not want to perform abortions are sometimes refused their right to conscientiously object and not perform it. However, the state has an obligation to respect the right of conscience as it is a right enshrined in International and European Human Rights law. The conscientious objection of medical staff was reiterated in the PACE report on *“The right to conscientious objection in lawful medical care”*.³⁴

All above-mentioned PACE reports underline the importance of the concept of conscientious objection and reasonable accommodation as tools to ensure the enjoyment of freedom of religion and expression by all citizens so that they can live in peace and harmony and in acceptance of their diversity. Reasonable accommodation is defined as an adjustment made in a system to accommodate or make an individual exception based on a proven need. As a concept, it was first mentioned in relation to the rights of people with disabilities. The purpose was to help them participate equally in the workplace. This concept has also been applied to protect the freedom of conscience as well as the freedom of religion or belief. The aim is to ensure that people are not discriminated if they do not want to act against their conscience.

The 2000 Council Directive³⁵ on equal treatment in employment established the role of reasonable accommodation in the area of the equal treatment of individuals. Moreover, a European Parliament resolution on the implementation of the 2000 Employment Directive recognized that *“a duty of reasonable accommodation for all grounds of discrimination – including, therefore, religion and belief – should be laid down in EU and national law, provided that this does not impose a disproportionate burden on employers or service providers;”*. It also called on member states to *“recognize the fundamental right of freedom of conscience”*. ECPM follows the recommendations on reasonable accommodation and freedom of conscience as outlined in the European Parliament resolution.

³⁴ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17909>

³⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32000L0078>