



## **Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe**

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

### **Conference of European Churches - Office of Communications**

**No. 02-39e**

**4 November 2002**

**The following Press Release has been issued by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).**

#### **ENABLING FAMILY REUNIFICATION FOR THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS SHOULD BE PRIORITY FOR EU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

"For us as a Church, the family is of central significance because it is the cradle of life", His Beatitude, Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece said at the conference held at the opening of the 15th General Assembly of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) in Athens on 1 November 2002. He had put the request to find agreement on the directive on family reunification for third country nationals to the government of Greece which is preparing to take over the European Union (EU) Presidency in January 2003. The Greek Minister of Interior, Mr. Constantinos Scandilidis, outlined the priorities of the Greek government for the EU Presidency in the first half of 2003. He stressed that it was extremely difficult to strike a good balance between the development of a sound immigration policy and the management of migration and control and security measures as the EU member states, particularly the Southern border countries, are facing an increase in illegal immigration, smuggling and trafficking.

Churches and church related agencies working on migration and refugees from across Europe are extremely concerned about the current negotiations in the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the EU. Archbishop Christodoulos expressed the churches' concern about the proposed waiting periods and conditions and stated that: "Adults have the maturity and strength to suppress their feelings and wait. The same does not hold true for little children. A great responsibility weighs upon the lawmaker when he decides, for example, that a minor child must wait five years - a quarter of his childhood - before he can be reunited with his family and once again live with his parents". He pointed to the experience of the Integration Center for Migrant Workers (KPSM) of the

Church of Greece, which had faced many family dramas and situations where serious psychological wounds had been inflicted upon families of Greek migrants from Germany when circumstances necessitated the children being separated from their parents.

The delegates to the CCME Assembly further discussed the issue. "Family life is an important factor for the integration of migrants in our societies", Annemarie Dupré from Italy, the newly elected moderator of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe stated. "We call on the EU member states, and particularly the present Danish and the upcoming Greek EU Presidency, to find a compromise which enables rather than prevents family life for third country nationals."

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