

European Parliament Elections

4-7 June 2009

Guide for Churches and Christian
organisations in the European Union

our Christian vision • our concerns • our questions

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“On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail.”

Charta Oecumenica

What's at stake

Between 4 and 7 June 2009, citizens of all 27 Member States of the European Union (EU) will express their vision for Europe by electing a new European Parliament. Parliament is the only EU institution whose members are directly elected by the citizens.

For five years, from 2009 to 2014, the 736* Members of European Parliament (MEPs) will make decisions that will have significant and long-lasting consequences, not only for some 500 million people living in the European Union, but for the entire world.

Since the last European Parliament elections in 2004, Parliament has gained considerable power. In most areas of community law, legislation must now be jointly approved by both the European Parliament and the Council. Furthermore, the President and Members of the College of European Commissioners, which proposes all new legislation, may only govern with Parliament's approval. Even more importantly, Parliament has final say over the EU budget.

*The Treaty of Lisbon, if ratified, would set the number of the MEPs to 751.

With climate change accelerating, financial crises deepening and the challenge to bring Europe closer to its citizens still to be met, the stakes could not be higher. This is why the European ecumenical organisations present in Brussels (APRODEV, CCME, CSC and Eurodiaconia) call on you to play an active role in raising awareness among your members and in your communities of the importance of the June 2009 European Parliament elections.

Even though the European Parliament's powers have increased, interest and participation in the parliamentary elections have decreased. With so much at stake in this election, we must work to reverse this trend and ensure that the next European Parliament will work to create the humane, socially-conscious Europe we all want.



How to use this pamphlet

As **Brussels-based ecumenical organisations**, we closely follow EU policy developments and work towards the humane, socially-conscious Europe envisioned by European churches in the Charta Oecumenica*.

We have produced this pamphlet to:

- ☛ Encourage churches to play an active role in the June 2009 European Parliament elections
- ☛ Highlight hopes and concerns about the future work of European Parliament
- ☛ Explain how the European Parliament might address specific issues of growing importance
- ☛ Give you ideas for questions and topics to discuss in debates with political parties and candidates

* The Charta Oecumenica "Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe" was signed by the presidents of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) in April 2001.
www.cec-kek.org/content/charta.shtml

We hope that you will draw on this pamphlet for your own activities around the elections, such as:

- ☛ European election coverage in church media, including interviews or questionnaires with parties and candidates
- ☛ Letters to parties and candidates highlighting issues of concern to churches
- ☛ Visits to constituency offices of incumbent MEPs to highlight church concerns
- ☛ Public debates with candidates and/or church policy experts organised and hosted by churches
- ☛ Official adoption of position papers and election positions by church synods and councils.

You are also welcome to translate this document into your own language and have it placed on our campaign website!




Safeguarding Creation: Climate Change and the Environment

The next European Parliament will have a significant say over policies that will both directly and indirectly influence climate change and environmental quality.

We applaud the progressive role the European Union has taken in shaping the global response to climate change. It led the negotiations and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. It created the world's largest carbon emissions trading scheme which, despite some weaknesses, promises major carbon dioxide (CO₂) reductions. Recently, EU leaders have committed to fast-track the EU towards an energy-conscious, low-carbon economy.

However, the EU's "energy footprint" remains far too large and EU Member States struggle to meet climate change commitments. Clearly, more must be done.

 **We believe** that economic structures that promote ever-increasing consumption harm the earth and contribute to climate change. Lifestyle changes, as well as technological improvements, are needed to reverse this trend.

- ✱ Are you ready to support policies that are necessary to make sure that EU Member States will reach their commitment of an 8% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2012?
- ✱ Would you support even more ambitious goals than the agreed 20% * reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020?
- ✱ Would you allocate additional resources to research on genuinely-renewable sources of energy?
- ✱ What policies would you support to promote energy saving and energy management?

* Besides the unilateral target of 20% reduction, Member States have also endorsed the goal of a 30% reduction provided there is an international agreement on this.



“We give thanks for the gift of creation... Together, we want to help create sustainable living conditions for the whole of creation.”

Charta Oecumenica

☛ **We believe** the EU should offer solidarity and help world regions suffering the most severe impacts of climate change. Many vulnerable communities are at risk of increased poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation. Principles of equity and justice should inform policy.

☛ Do you think that the EU has a responsibility to provide additional and adequate financial and technology support to developing countries to allow them to continue reducing poverty without exacerbating the climate problem?

☛ Would you support incorporating robust social and human rights criteria in policies (e.g. agriculture, trade, development) which could affect the environment?

☛ **We believe** a thoughtful discussion is needed on the ethics of growing bio-fuels and the use of GMOs (genetically modified organisms). The impact on developing countries as well as on EU farmers and consumers should be considered.

☛ What share would you accept for biofuels within the overall energy mix for renewables?

☛ What is your view on the labelling and segregation of GM foodstuffs?

☛ How do you weigh the argument that GMOs help reduce hunger with the risk of increased dependency on wealthy countries and reduced biodiversity?



Welcoming the Stranger: Migration and Refugee Protection

The next European Parliament will have a crucial impact on migration and asylum policy throughout the EU. It will take office just as a new migration and asylum programme is to be adopted. Parliament will thus approve, often in co-decision with the Council, binding “framework legislation” (directives) that Member States must transpose into national law. This may include legislation to further harmonise asylum procedures, manage legal immigration, reduce irregular immigration, and prevent human trafficking.

Migrants must not only be welcomed by the EU but also integrated into European society. The 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue raised awareness of the growing cultural diversity within the EU and the need for intercultural dialogue to bridge ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural divides. These efforts need to continue.

 **We believe** in Europe as a welcoming society and champion of human rights. We believe that the EU should promote intercultural dialogue and encourage citizens to be aware of their own and respectful for others’ cultural heritage, including its religious dimension.

- ✱ How do you propose to strengthen intercultural dialogue within Europe beyond the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue?
- ✱ How would you work towards making the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of religion/belief, race or ethnic origin a reality?
- ✱ How do you think the harmonisation of EU asylum legislation could offer a higher degree of protection to refugees and access to full and fair asylum procedures?
- ✱ How do you recommend allocating EU resources between measures preventing irregular immigration and measures supporting the reception and integration of migrants and refugees?

“Together, we will do our part towards giving migrants, refugees and asylum seekers a humane reception in Europe.”

Charta Oecumenica

☛ **We believe** Europe must extend solidarity to other regions experiencing a high influx of refugees.

- ☛ How could the EU better share responsibility for refugees with other world regions, for example through refugee resettlement?
- ☛ Given new reasons for migration, such as environmental degradation, how can protection be extended to these vulnerable groups?

☛ **We believe** that proactive migration policies should respect the dignity of all persons - including the right of migrants to family life.

- ☛ Do you support the EU's adoption of binding instruments on migrants' rights such as the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of all Migrants and their Families? ☛

www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/m_mwctoc.htm

☛ **We believe** that trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, forced labour and other purposes must be addressed as an alarming crime and violation of human rights.

- ☛ How could the EU move beyond the repression of cross-border crossings related to trafficking to develop a full-fledged policy to protect the rights of trafficked persons?
- ☛ Should the EU ratify the Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking? ☛

www.coe.int/t/DG2/TRAFFICKING/campaign/default_en.asp



Living in Dignity: Poverty and Social Exclusion

Many decisions by the European Parliament, in areas ranging from internal market legislation to agricultural policy, impact the quality of life and cohesiveness of European society. Through its control of the budget, it also influences the amount of EU funds allocated to programs and services to promote social inclusion and combat poverty.

☞ **We believe** European societies should be based on the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility and the inclusion of all.

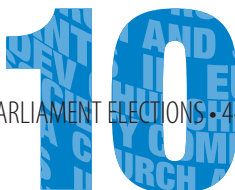
- ☼ Would you use your influence, including in reports and committees, to ensure that the impact of all EU legislation on the social well-being of people in the EU Member States is considered?
- ☼ What would you do to guarantee that the commitments made by the EU institutions and Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion are upheld?

☞ **We believe** accessible, quality social and healthcare services are a necessary prerequisite for social inclusion.

- ☼ How would you promote a legal environment that allows both state and non-state providers, including churches and diaconal organisations, to offer quality social and healthcare services in a financially sustainable way?
- ☼ Would you work towards increasing the importance of social inclusion within future European Social Fund (ESF) budgets?

☞ **We believe** people with disabilities should be supported, when necessary, to fully participate in society.

- ☼ Which policies would you promote to ensure that all people with disabilities can participate in and contribute to society?
- ☼ Would you regulate medical acts that promote human “perfection”?



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“Because we value the person and dignity of every individual as made in the image of God, we defend the absolute equal value of all human beings.”

Charta Oecumenica

☛ **We believe** each phase of life has its own value. Each generation links to and supports the next.

- ☼ What policies would you promote so Europeans may grow old with dignity?
- ☼ How would you promote the inclusion of youth in the labour market?

☛ **We believe** stewardship of the environment must include care for fragile rural communities.

- ☼ How do you think common agricultural policy (CAP) funds should be allocated between rural development and price supports for agricultural products?

☛ **We believe** gender equality is an important element of social justice.

- ☼ Do you support the 50/50 Campaign ☼ for Democracy <http://www.5050democracy.eu/> to ensure women and men are equally represented in EU decision-making bodies?
- ☼ How would you proceed to make the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of sex a reality?



Caring for our Neighbour: Peace and Development

The **European Parliament** influences EU foreign and development policy primarily through its control of the budget. It also calls attention to issues of concern in committees and plenary sessions.

☞ **We believe** that peaceful forms of conflict resolution should take precedence over military approaches.

- ☼ Would you ensure adequate funding for conflict prevention?
- ☼ Should Parliament promote more open, transparent and inclusive co-operation between diplomacy, aid, and stakeholders to support conflict resolution and peaceful development? If so, how?

☞ **We believe** that the European Union should live up to its principles of democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights both abroad and at home.

- ☼ Should the EU accede to the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- ☼ Would you urge EU Member States to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of Justice?
- ☼ Do you think the European Parliament should establish a full committee for human rights instead of the present subcommittee?



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS • 4-7 JUNE 2009

“In view of numerous conflicts, the churches are called upon to serve together the cause of reconciliation among peoples and cultures.”

Charta Oecumenica

☛ **We believe** that we must practise solidarity with the poor throughout the world.

- ☛ What would you do to ensure that the EU meets its commitments to the Millennium Development Goals?

☛ **We believe** that quality and quantity of aid are equally important. Policy-making should follow a rights-based approach and involve the poor in decisions that directly affect their livelihoods.

- ☛ How can Parliament help make aid more effective, more predictable, accountable, transparent and better coordinated?
- ☛ Do you advocate using EU aid and external relations policies to support participatory political structures in partner countries?

☛ **We believe** all EU policies, including trade, agricultural, and fiscal policies, should support development goals of world poverty reduction.

- ☛ How could EU trade policies be oriented towards poverty reduction and environmental protection?
- ☛ Should Parliament promote financial transparency and tax justice in order to avoid capital flight and tax evasion?



Where to get additional information

This pamphlet is just a start. You will hopefully wish to learn more on specific issues as well as national perspectives on these topics. Here are some ideas of where to look:

☛ **APRODEV, CCME, CSC, and Eurodiaconia** will be happy to advise you on ways to engage with the European Parliament elections. Take a look at our joint election campaign website (www.ecumenicalvoices2009.eu) for more information on the various topics raised in this leaflet. The website also provides information on the campaigns our partner organisations are leading with regard to the elections.

☛ **European Parliament information offices** in Member States distribute detailed, non-biased information on numerous topics – in your language! In some cases, they can even serve as resource people for events. To find an office near you, visit: www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/nearYou.do

☛ **Political parties** running for election will be keenly interested in sharing information with you. Obviously, they will have a clear political bias.

☛ **Colleagues** in your own church administration may have expert knowledge.

About us

APRODEV is the association of 17 development and humanitarian aid organisations in Europe which are related to the World Council of Churches.

www.aprodev.net

The Church and Society Commission (CSC)

is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters). It engages its member churches and associated organisations in studies and projects relevant to church and society and thus supports and strengthens the common witness of European churches vis-à-vis the European Institutions and in the respective European societies.

www.cec-kek.org

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)

is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies in presently 17 European countries. CCME cooperates with the World Council of Churches and is in the process of becoming a commission of CEC.

www.ccme.be

Eurodiaconia is a federation of churches, non-statutory welfare organisations and NGOs from 21 European countries. Its strategic aims are to ensure quality of life for all in a social Europe, to link institutions of diaconia, social initiatives and churches in Europe, and to be and to enhance a network of competence.

www.eurodiaconia.org

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GUIDE FOR CHURCHES AND CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



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