

Justice and Peace Europe, 27 March 2015/Brussels

Promoting social rights – Reducing social inequality

The Executive Committee of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) welcomes the Brussels Document¹ on the future of social rights in Europe and the proposal it contains to improve the protection of social rights as human rights.

The document is the encouraging result of the Conference of the Belgian presidency of the Council of Europe, which took place in Brussels on 12-13 February, and an important step in the Turin process, launched in October 2014. This process aims to allow all European citizens to benefit from the European Social Charter fifty years after it entered into force. Through its representative at the Council of Europe, *Justice and Peace Europe* has been actively involved in this process.

A first step to further reinforce the impact of the European Social Charter on the daily life of citizens should be better public information about its contents as well as a proper evaluation of the state of ratification and implementation of the document in its initial form from 1961 and in its revised version from 1996.

Furthermore, the conferences in Turin and in Brussels have shown that social rights have progressed vastly since the first adoption of the European Social Charter. However, especially in the current economic downturn, a new sensibility for the social human rights needs to be created. Increasing child poverty and unacceptable levels of unemployment, especially among the young generation are a scandal in one of the richest regions of the world. Current deterioration of social and territorial inequality has increased in Europe, which in fact threatens social cohesion and democracy on our continent. The Brussels Document rightly complains that *“the crises have resulted in an erosion of social citizenship, posing a substantial threat to Europeans’ sense of solidarity and loyalty to the European project.”*

In his speech to the European Parliament last November Pope Francis stressed that *“promoting the dignity of the person means recognizing that he or she possesses inalienable rights which no one may take away arbitrarily, much less for the sake of economic interests.”* And in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* he wrote, *“inequality is the root of social ills”* (202).

We are of course aware that guaranteeing social rights involves financial resources. In a market economy, companies need to generate profits in order to be able to pay wages and taxes and, thus, sustain social welfare programs.

¹ http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/TurinConference/Brussels-Document-de-Bruxelles_bil.pdf

However, over the last thirty years tax evasion and tax avoidance schemes of very rich individuals and private companies have largely increased in Europe and worldwide. Recent reports about so-called “tax-rulings” allow multinational companies to drastically reduce their tax bills. We therefore welcome recent initiatives at the level of the G20 and the OECD and we support efforts of the European Commission to increase the transparency of tax-rulings. We also wish the special commission of the European Parliament on these matters much success. It started its investigations on 10 March and we are looking forward to its recommendations. We sincerely hope that these initiatives will contribute to more justice in taxation, which is an important key to promoting social rights and reducing social inequality.

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (*Justice and Peace Europe*) is a European network of 31 national Justice and Peace Commissions, working for the promotion of justice, peace and respect for human dignity. It contributes to raising awareness of the Catholic social doctrine in the European societies and the European institutions.
The Executive Committee of *Justice and Peace Europe* is composed of 9 elected members and its president is Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg.

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