

Erlbach Declaration 2006

The reformation of our economic and social welfare systems and the current form of the European process of unification is today arousing in many people more fears than hopes.

These developments force all Christian Social activists to call for adherence to their basic principles:

- People are individuals and at the same time part of society
- Social responsibility means serving the people
- Freedom has to go hand in hand with solidarity, individuality and subsidiarity
- To work is a basic human right; it enables people not only to earn a living, but also to realise their own potential and take part in society

Money is a reimbursement for work done. It follows from this that at times of change it is essential to limit the power of capital, if one wants to follow in a Christian Social way the principle that 'man goes before capital'. 'Social peace' is more important than the return on capital.

The problem dominating everything in European societies is the now long entrenched mass unemployment. Being out of work robs people of their material basics, of their future prospects and of their involvement in society. The increasing indifference towards them – an accusation that people are now levelling at politicians – goes totally against our concept of mankind.

We need strategies that are geared not only to economic productivity and the demands of business but also to people and their needs as a whole. This includes above all safeguarding incomes and promoting the family.

We are therefore calling for an appropriate about-turn in policy. We are specifically calling for the action listed below in the following areas:

- Combating illegal employment
- Social security today and tomorrow
- Changes in employment relationships
- Demographic changes

Combating illegal employment

- 'illegal employment' can only be stopped by strict controls; strengthened cross-border collaboration is also needed for this
- it must be ensured that laws against 'illegal employment' are enforced equally throughout all of Europe
- Work done on a non-profit basis to provide mutual help in the family environment is not 'illegal employment'; legal principles need to be created for other forms of work in this area
- the phenomenon of 'illegal employment' needs to be further examined so that it can be systematically combated

Social security today and tomorrow

- maintaining a social security system that reliably guarantees a decent standard of living is a cornerstone of the 'European social model' and requires acknowledgement of social responsibility from all sections of society
- solidarity between generations must be preserved even under changing demographic conditions
- for this to be achieved, however, the funding of social security systems needs to be no longer based predominantly on the 'work' factor, but needs instead increasingly to incorporate other factors such as corporate profits (companies cannot be allowed to back out of this solidarity between the whole of society)
- in every country a minimum level of social security needs to be established that enables people to live a decent life; this includes setting up a minimum wage (on an industry-by-industry basis)
- determining the services provided by each social security system comes – in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity – under the jurisdiction of each EU Member State

- utilising the options of company and private welfare provision is to be thought of as additional security
- the State must be aware of its role as guarantor of social welfare protection and ensure that the relevant regulations are enforced

Changes in employment relationships

- We demand clear safeguards in employment and social welfare law for all workers - including those in so-called 'atypical' employment relationships – who have to earn their living from their work.
- As soon as a worker is largely or wholly tied to the directions of an employer, then this is a normal employment relationship
- This should be protected by legal and/or wage agreement regulations.
- Minimum standards of social welfare protection are required within the European internal market; otherwise European regulations cannot help to undermine national social welfare standards.
- People in Europe should be comprehensively informed about this problem area and the protection applicable for them.

Demographic changes

- Demographic change in Europe is characterised by a low birth-rate and greater life expectancy.
- Insecurity on the job market, precarious employment relationships and constantly increasing demands for workers to be more flexible are all contributing to fewer and fewer young couples deciding to have children.
- From a Christian Social perspective, the family and children must, however, not be allowed to be reduced just to their value as an 'economic factor'; rather they are the basis of our societies. Families are therefore to be promoted; a sound family environment, such as good childcare, also needs to be created. However, none of this will be enough if we do not significantly strengthen the attitude and solidarity towards families.
- Demographic change is also influenced by immigration; a young migrant in Europe can care for an elderly European and thus become legally integrated into the job market.

In light, in particular, of a Europe with no strong character, the process of European unification is today arousing in many people more fears than hopes. The one-sided focus on 'liberalisation' and pan-European 'competition' is making many people afraid that this project is less to do with securing peace than it is with profit.

The opportunities offered by the peaceful coexistence of so many different peoples and cultures are all too frequently obscured by a purely economics-based way of thinking.

We therefore summarise our approach as follows:

EUROPE MUST BE SOCIALLY AWARE – OR THERE WILL BE NO EUROPE.

The attendees (from 15 countries) of an international conference in Erlbach, Vogtland, 27th-20th October 2006