



ECPM POLITICAL PROGRAM



2019-2024

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Introduction

Europe is going through turbulent times. In the previous mandate, the EU faced a refugee crisis, a Euro crisis and one of its member states has decided to leave the European Union. Additionally, we see a deepening rift between Eastern and Western member states. Looking ahead at the current mandate, there are signs on the horizon pointing to another economic crisis and geopolitical shifts which could alter the face of Europe irrevocably. In this 2019-2024 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.

In many European countries, our members face continuous pushback and challenge from activist NGOs with a radical left-liberal agenda aiming to fundamentally change the concept and definition of humanity. 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.

Ten years after the last economic crisis, the European Union is on a more stable ground, but not completely recovered. 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.

With each European election, the ECPM wishes to highlight 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!

A Europe of Human Dignity

Human dignity expresses the intrinsic value of every human being. We believe this universal principle rests on the human being as 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. Because of 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 NGO's regarding this subject.

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. Human dignity is not fully realized if the value of committed relations is not appreciated and cherished. Human dignity includes valuing relations and striving towards the right and just relations 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. Human Dignity is the basis of Human Rights.

The intrinsic value of the human being includes every stage of human existence. Excluding the beginning or the end of human life from treatment as human, undermines fundamentally the intrinsic value of the human being and is therefore a violation of human dignity. We cannot exclude any stage of human life from human dignity. Thus, there is a particular need to protect vulnerable, handicapped, 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 legal instruments in large part take the form of general obligations in directives, which must be transposed into EU law and implemented by member states in full respect of fundamental rights, including the rights of the child.

Rights of children already start at the conception. Unborn children should be included in the right to live. Everyone has the right to get born, to live. We therefore support all kind of coaching and support of expecting mothers.

Children are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, violence and abuse. ECPM has witnessed the international commitments in the improvement the lives of children such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, it underlines the urgent need for the EU member states to pay special attention to the most vulnerable and socially excluded children. Improving the living conditions of

children and providing them opportunities to live a fulfilling life is an essential element of development.

However, ECPM stresses that sustainable policies in favour of 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

The circumstances for parenting and guiding children have become more difficult where parents or guardians experience several challenges. ECPM observes that the EU has tried to interfere extensively in the school programs by indicating a specific form of education. We are convinced that parents need and should have freedom to choose how they want to raise their children and which values and beliefs they want to pass on to them. More concretely, it is not a competence of the European Union to decide over such topics. This is a case for the member states themselves to decide upon.

Education is very important for children to get a good future. ECPM therefore supports education that strives to get the best out of children, which focuses on all the gifts and talents they have. In general, it is the best for children to go to school and meet other children there. This helps them in developing social skills as well. Especially in rural areas we see a brain drain to more urban areas. We call upon governments to take care of community schools, to invest and support in them so that children can go to school close to their homes. However, in certain circumstances home schooling can be a good alternative.

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

We do firmly believe that the EU member states should cooperate on supporting child protection systems where the child's best interests should be considered, regardless of their status. The care that

refugee minors receive in the reception cares is key factor in their long-term adjustments and should be regulated at the national level.

ECPM suggests that the action at 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. 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; enhance coordination 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; and ensure that refugee children use and enhance hotlines created to respond to their disappearances.

Aging

Thanks to better healthcare our society is aging. Many elderly people face difficulties in that, especially loneliness. ECPM sees these problems and wants to address them. We stand for aging with dignity. Our elderly people should be treated with respect and gratitude for all the work they did in their lives. Our societies should cherish them and care for them. Therefore, we believe that addressing loneliness is one of the best initiatives which can be taken.

Taking care of the older generation also means investing in care. ECPM believes that intergenerational solidarity is very important. Young people should be able to take care of the elderly people. We therefore believe that informal and customized care should be prioritized. Especially people taking care of their neighbours or family members should get financial support for their work. Furthermore, we believe coaching by special 'life coaches' could help to age with dignity.

When the end of life is near, ECPM believes that palliative care should be the choice. Ending life when it is 'not worthy to live' is not an option to us, as life is given and created by God. We believe that with a social network, customized care, life-coaches for mental health and palliative care, life can be dignified till the end.

Disability

ECPM believes that life is worthy to live. Every life matters, even if it is not viewed as perfect. People living with disabilities are fully part of our societies, no matter if they are physically or mentally disabled. We urge countries to support people with disabilities, both financially and judicially.

An Economy that Works for People and Planet

Economy is about life. The purpose of all economic activity is to support life and advance wellbeing for all. We believe that initiative and ownership empower people. We encourage the development of small and medium-sized companies (counting for 67% of employment) and a focus on improvement of the investment climate for innovative entrepreneurs. ECPM believes that globalization has many positive aspects but is not by definition a good development. We are critical on agreements like CETA and TTIP as we believe that they 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 still very important for 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 take action now to reduce pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and to invest in sustainable energy sources.

Economy is meant to provide sufficient means for all people, to support family, life from conception to natural death, to let people flourish with their creative talents and to find solutions for the problems we face.

The end of the status quo and the road ahead

So far, the large mainstream parties have continued to maintain the economic status quo. The word 'reform' still means that workers will have less security and stability for their families and that economic growth does not translate in more economical long-term security for many people. Multinationals, shareholders and capital markets are in this status-quo approach still the first and major beneficiaries of any economic growth and hardly ever touched by reforms. The status-quo approach mostly does not touch powerful vested interests. This disparity fuels left and right-wing populism and translates to political instability.

Real reform however should lead to change for all stakeholders in the economy, including financial markets, shareholders and multinationals. ECPM members want to kickstart this in the upcoming years. In recent years a very slow start has been made in 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 access to capital. EU policies that encourage further concentration of capital and power therefore need to be rejected.

There is need for a broader 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 and responsible government and business behaviour and actions. The goal of 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 strive for economic policies that consider the impact of policy 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-centered and not financially centered
- Applies the potential of technology by respecting human dignity
- Insist on transparency
- Cultivates long term thinking
- Is as inclusive as possible and does not cave in to pressure from vested interests at the expense of other stakeholders and 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 state level.

At EU level:

- To 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 tendering². This in order to end the current practice in which large companies & multinationals are automatically the largest beneficiaries of EU economic support policies (both in the CAP 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 striving 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

At Member State level:

- Restore the trust between governments and electorates by requiring intergenerational 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 ECB
- 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

“The world changes ever faster than before” is a remark made often, usually followed by “and we have to change as well, otherwise we will become obsolete!” This chapter deals with questions related to innovation and the role that ECPM believes that the government should play to facilitate technical and economic development.

Research & Development is not something that became important in the last couple of decades, ECPM believes that God himself has given mankind the order to develop and take care of His Creation (Genesis 2:15). Throughout history, we can observe the ongoing development of humanity, both in good and evil. Good developments in terms of ever-higher life expectancy based on increasing medicine and better understanding of hygiene for example, and at the same time evil developments in terms of ever more destructive power of weapons of mass destruction.

Innovation is therefore not a neutral subject and requires careful and ethic discussions about what are desirable directions to move forward and which directions to stay out of. Innovation is, besides being attractive because of new developments 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.

It can therefore be understood that innovation is sometimes for citizens and established companies not a very pleasant process, as it distorts the market and prevents them from situations of “doing business as usual”. Not surprisingly, many such companies or large organizations will try to lobby at governments, in order to block markets from such disrupting innovations. Even though ECPM values freedom of opinion and expression, it is wary of lobbyists trying to prove that innovations will lead to loss of jobs and mass unemployment. History has shown that new jobs (and usually more interesting ones) will appear after jobs in old obsolete industries disappear, as long as there is investment in

promising new technologies and support of people who are enterprising and decide to start their own business.

Why should governments invest in innovation?

ECPM believes Europe can further strengthen its position in the world as technology hub, by investing more in Research & Development. Already for decades, the average spending on R&D of EU member states is lower than the OECD average and this is not a very reassuring statistic for the long term. Of course governments are not the only actors here, large corporations and higher education institutes (whether public or private) are also important to have in mind. For governments it means that it has to remove barriers (mainly bureaucratic procedures and/or taxation) in order to create more effective innovation communities. Scientists report to spend up to 30% of their work hours on acquiring funding, and they look at low acceptance percentages for their proposals. This is an enormous waste of energy and resources. Tax measures for money invested in research & development in companies may help the private sector in designating larger amount of funds towards product and service development.

Government funding can help with developing desired technologies in order to facilitate sustainable development. Leaving this research completely to the market may not be the best idea as large corporations may have a strong conflict of interest when doing research. For example, large oil and mining companies would, by definition, have a conflict of interest when investing in energy saving technology or investing in the transition towards sustainable energy. They may provide lip service and some minor programs to “support energy transition”, but in the end it is the profit maximization and the expected shareholder value that has the decisive voice in the decision-making process. Pharmaceutical organizations are another example of such type of businesses, that with the current strict interpretation of patents on medicine, these companies operate with very large gross profit margin. Because of the current intellectual property laws and protection provided, government rules and regulations rather hinder innovation in the sector than stimulate it.

What areas should governments invest in?

In the previous section can be seen that in some cases, because of the disruptive force of innovations, a conflict of interests can occur within established businesses leading to abandoning or blocking the development of (especially) capital-intensive innovations. However, in Europe (as well as other countries outside of it of course), there are many creative and enterprising people who would like to build their own company, to try to bring new inventions to the market. Offering these entrepreneurs support in terms of coaching and facilities, is crucial to help them to survive and grow, and help the market with adopting innovations, breaking the conservative powers in the market of large established businesses. Disruptive start-ups like Tesla have thoroughly changed the automobile industry worldwide and have led to a large increase of 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, from the point of view of the budget, it is much less costly to invest in entrepreneurship, than by creating 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 a number of 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 worldwide competitive 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 suggests 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 in 2050) and fund initiatives fitting with these ideas. Based on its Biblical principles of developing and taking care of the Creation, ECPM believes there is certainly room for a “desired direction approach”, next to the before mentioned “innovative entrepreneurship support approach” and “cluster approach”. This would mean a substantial increase in funding 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 attempts of the EU to support the member-states with policies to raise the average education level of the European citizens, as higher education and innovation go hand in hand. It is for European economies the only – sustainable – way out of economic crises and can substantially improve the economies of especially Southern Europe, where the economy is in many cases still dependent on commodity goods. Being non-innovative 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, bribery and nepotism which are very detrimental to the general competitiveness of regions and countries in the long run.

Sustainability, Industry and Agriculture

A 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 are clearly interdependent. Climate change is a phenomenon that we must deal with together. Food safety requires solid rules and monitoring of these rules 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 is a biblical assignment. In the last decades, it has become clear that human actions have a large influence on our planet and climate. ECPM has no doubts that we need to improve our ability to face 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 with 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 invest in economies that are currently less innovative, to make it possible for them to make their economy more sustainable. 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, while they will discourage the use of more polluting methods and energy sources that would maintain a polluting economy. 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. The budget for agricultural subsidies through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2015-2020 is over 250 billion euros. However, the CAP needs to reform in order to meet key objectives and face key challenges. ECPM wants these reforms to aim at the goals and not to 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 to enable 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 direct the reforms in a certain, EU decided, direction. 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) proposed a more regional approach with only a basic framework from Brussels. ECPM supports the idea behind this reform and believes that the powerbase should shift from Brussels to the regions.

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.

ECPM also want a simplification of the current rules related to fishery. In some circumstance 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.

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. New agreements with the United Kingdom are needed as around 50% of all the fish that is caught in the North Sea is caught in British waters.

Industry & transport

Industry is an important component for economy and industrial production is a key factor to review a country's economy. ECPM believes that EU has a role to play related to industry: we want the European Institutions to advocate green sustainable industries, advocate a leading role for innovation and to make sure that the polluter pays. Apart from those criteria, 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, and it is clearly beneficial for trade within the EU. Since the current policies are working, ECPM does not believe in major reforms in this area. However, some minor improvements 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 finding new European agency's that deal with a "new" problem. 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 as a consequence 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 nature 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.

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 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 state 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 and Healthy Marriages

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. People are always connected through relations 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. Because of that ECPM recognizes the importance of national policymaking which put family in focus.

ECPM believes that family policy is foremost a matter of national policy. Based on the principles of subsidiarity the European institutions should not interfere in family policies. However, many topics where the EU does have the power to make legislation are related to family policy, as for example labour laws. ECPM believes that the European Union should be very careful in these topics, respecting the opinions of the member states. We also believe that the EU should stay away of taking any initiatives in this field or proposing legislation that goes against or over national legislation of member states or pushing for alternative family forms.

We believe that the EU should mainstream its policies on its effects on families. ECPM believes that the European Institutions should value the family more instead of merely the individual. We believe that societies that are rooted in strong families are more relational, compassionate and sustainable.

On a national level, ECPM 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 on the national political levels in Europe.

As ECPM, we do firmly believe that the policies fostering reconciliation between qualifications, labour market participation and family life affect positively on the economic growth in the long run.

Men and women should have the choice between childcare services and freely choose to work fewer hours to take care of their children, especially if it concerns children with disabilities. Flexible forms of employment are a must here. 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 as a whole. 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 child care 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.

ECPM strongly supports counselling and educational programs which will increase the capability of individuals to create and live in lifelong devoted relationships – in marriage and family. ECPM also supports programs which will decrease addictions and violence among youth and all other factors which disable them to realise stable and happy family life.

Cooperation between EU and member states

As the family is the cornerstone of society, ECPM suggests that legislative acts on all levels will be checked on their impact for families. European countries should keep each other accountable on these issues and try to cooperate and learn from each other. At the same time, we shouldn't forget those who are single or (un)married without children. We all belong to a (wider) family and should be recognized as such.

As a last part of this chapter, but nonetheless very important is the question about the future of lower educated labour in Europe. The tendency is that more and more jobs for people with lower education are replaced by computerization and automatization of production/business processes based on artificial intelligence. Even though tourism as a sector is increasing Europe wide in terms of both turnover and number of jobs and is a prime sector for offering jobs for people with lower education, it cannot be denied that there is a threat of increasing long-term unemployment, in especially this vulnerable group of the population. Long-term sustainable solutions for this unemployment problem are difficult to imagine and implement and require careful thought as well as planning for opportunities. Based on its Christian principles, ECPM strongly advocates policies for an inclusive Europe, which should offer support to member states and individual regions about policies to avoid people losing contact with available job opportunities. 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 would strive – as much as possible – to avoid migration out of poverty or necessity from Central/Eastern Europe to Western Europe, which has a large and negative impact on the parts of the families that are left behind. Building a more innovative economy is the best way forward to prevent this from happening.

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

In this interconnected world, the topic foreign affairs is no longer merely about the relation between states. Foreign affairs have direct implications on the lives of citizens. When in 2016 one million refugees from Syria walked through Europe it became clear that developments beyond the EU can impact people anywhere in the EU member states.

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.

The aftermath of the refugee crisis started in 2016, has opened up some fundamental debates and political developments in the EU member states. However, there is in many policy fields still an artificial 'wall' between foreign affairs and internal challenges. For example, in the aftermath of terrorist attacks by ISIS there was a lot of attention on internal security cooperation and small attention to the war against ISIS in its strongholds and coordination centres in Syria. In integration policy there is a lot of attention for integration of minority communities in Europe but not how cultural mentality of these communities is shaped by the continuing influence from outside Europe. However, this influence from outside at the mentality of communities in Europe is a major factor for their integration. If countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia were to implement 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.

It is not possible to enforce in any way a practical application of fundamental freedoms in other societies. However, the 'way of Europe' is that of cooperation. It is very unlikely that these regimes will actively cooperate in supporting a culture that will spread the notion of universal access to fundamental freedoms and reduce the need for immigration. It is clear that the EU needs to maintain diplomatic relations and try all angles in improving situations, but it cannot be left to formal state-actors alone. It is important for the EU member states 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.

Furthermore, the notions of human dignity and fundamental freedoms should determine our relations with other areas in the world as well as well as in trade agreements. It would not be an idealistic approach but a long-term approach that will render long-term and more lasting results.

Finally, this approach rests on the common work of the EU member states who can only together decide where there is need on a common effort in foreign affairs.

EU cooperation

Foreign Affairs continues to be the competence of the member states. The EEAS 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 Commissioner should no longer represent the foreign affairs 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 can furthermore support policies that are determined by joined decision of the member states where the EU member states determine that a common approach is needed in facing a common challenge.

Supporting Israel is important to clarify to the MENA & Central Asian countries that the EU member states are serious in their commitment to fundamental rights and freedoms. The ECPM underscores the need to support the security of Israel and be clear on its right to exist.

Similarly, the EU member states should cooperate in not allowing foreign states or entities to be or become a threat to fundamental freedoms of citizens or residents of EU member states.

EU member states should cooperate in active support for states or regions that implement fundamental freedoms and give them preferential treatment.

EU – level Trade Agreements must be based on human dignity and support the development of a free society.

Russia and China should understand that the EU member states do not support foreign aggression and expansionism and that a good relationship with the EU can only be achieved if aggressive ambitions are ended.

National level

A Europe-wide understanding is necessary to see the link between integration and security challenges (Islam terrorism) and foreign affairs. Furthermore, it is important to understand that these challenges are in many ways related to the dominant cultural features in MENA & Central Asia.

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

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 condition for acceptance in the EU member state. It should be considered to revoke refugee status 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 states 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 support a message of hate and/or a message that runs counter to fundamental and constitutional equalities 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 for many years now leans on the USA for security and defence. The (public) impression that the USA merely does this in "our" (best) interest however is wrong. The last decade has shown that the interests of the USA not always are the same to that of the European nations. EU member states as well have shown different industrial-, foreign affairs- and

security interests⁵⁸ 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 forces⁵⁹. 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 political authority of the sovereign state(s). Only states can have a standing army, so the issue of all European defence matters immediately touch the very nature of EU member states and the EU itself. Subsidiarity in relation to defence and security matters is best explained by one of the founding fathers of the EU, Robert Schuman⁶¹.

“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.”

The EU institutions must accept that political priorities in member states are connected to democratic election results, and they will unavoidably lead to different approaches between member states over time. Cooperation should therefore 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 however the current proposals for PESCO and the Single Defence market will most probably result in three consequences:

The sovereignty of smaller member states will decline and lose control over their own defence industries, and thus capabilities of their armed forces.

Additionally, the largest European (and American) global military industries will dominate the single European Defence Market with the consequence of lesser competition (less choice, higher cost).

Finally, nations will lose sovereign control over defence manufacturing capabilities. Although the EC is mentioning there are positive effects for the Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SME's) in Europe, but we have reason to believe those companies are suppliers of parts and not the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) we are talking about, which have shown to be able to develop, produce and sustain high quality military hardware at lower cost, both in acquisition and sustainment. These EC proposals and current decisions on PESCO seem to be mainly in the interest of big defence industrial groups and do not serve the security of the peoples of Europe.

Therefore, we propose:

European nations can create a more modular and flexible defence capability not by focussing on joint acquisition of platforms but rather on equipping these “national” or “binational” platforms with common and modular with modular parts, fuel-, sensors and weapon systems (missiles, guns and ammunition) so these are interchangeable and create a more streamlined logistics and interchangeable support capability. In this way, every country can maintain its own defence industry.

Another way of cooperation which can be made more effective are the European Union-Battlegroups (EUBG)⁶² framework but on a voluntarily basis only. These structures shouldn't be permanent but modular and according to NATO standards, procedures and training which is an easy thing to do since

the NATO standard is the normal standard for westernized countries. The main purpose is to defend the fundamental freedoms and values of Europe.

Creating modular structures within national armed forces so the deployment of EUBG and NATO response forces will be much smoother and easier. The way countries organize their units (battalions, companies, platoons) is nowadays often based on historic compositions and a more scientific approach should be taken. This measure will make a more efficient, robust and flexible cooperation between EUBG and NATO response forces possible.

An area where European funds would be spent wisely is on the development of these European-wide standardized unit compositions, future technologies and so on, but not investing money 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 have very positive and visible effects on the citizens of European countries: Traveling, working and trading freely within the union. This removal of internal borders however also has its consequences. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels have shown that people could enter Europe under cover of refugee streams (both through the Italy and Greek routes) and that the lack of internal border control created a blind spot. Recently, it came to light that illegal sale of Schengen visas takes place, endangering the security of Schengen. ECPM calls upon the EU to investigate this.

Some member countries are, in a way, responsible for the outside borders and others have lower border control needs because they have been taken care for by other countries. It is the obvious thing to do to increase the support by other EU member states to the countries with external borders, either by financial means or material / personal. Since the control of the external borders is of great importance for all countries involved it shouldn't be the sole responsibility for the 'border' country alone. It is rather strange that for many years now Greece and Cyprus are under constant deliberate incursions of their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (which are based on international law) and airspace by ships (coast guard and Navy) and aircraft (Turkish Air Force). This could be done by forming an EU Mediterranean naval patrol force where also other EU member countries could contribute to. EU member states could also form flexible employable border guard / military police units which could respond to (short-term) increased needs if required. This situation together with the regulated influx of refugees into Europe show the importance of a joint and solidary European position. Not only does Turkey violate the Greek Airspace and waters, they do the same to EU, which means to all of us. A firm and honest position would be that doing this would have consequences for Turkey which the EU should and could impose. The same should count of course for other bordering area's like Spain (Morocco, Tunisia), Malta and Italy (Libya), Baltic states and so on.

Therefore, we propose:

EU external borders are also a responsibility of the EC / EEAS which means that if external borders are breached by third countries (like Turkey) then a firm response should be given in order to protect our European interests.

EU member states should support the countries with EU external borders more, both in financial and material way.

Cyber security

Europe in the 21^e century is completely dependent on data and communication networks. Attacks on governmental-, economic- and (civil) electronic infrastructure can have severe consequences on our societies. All could be targets which makes a diffuse area between cybercrime (police) and cyberwarfare (military). Actors as ISIS/Daesh are active in the cyber domain as well.

We have to realize that it's a fact that European countries all depend on each other: all economic-, cyber- and data networks are completely integrated. If each country tries to protect and secure its own networks, this will create a situation that even the best protected countries can be infiltrated through the networks of less well protected networks within the EU broader network. Cyberthreats against our societies and infrastructure could come from state- and non-state actors which makes it difficult to address the threat as a military or civilian security operation. Also the creation of national and EU Cyber warfare units need to be controlled and subject to international law. Uncontrolled cyberattacks lead to crisis situations. The basic rule should be that international law should also be valid in cyber.

Political decision-making still needs to be applied. However about 50% of staff working in cyber are often civilian and external staff which means that they are not really under government control. The question we could ask ourselves if these external companies have the same values and ethical rules of engagement as military and government personnel are obliged to consider. One best practice example which could be introduced in other countries and the EU level is that of Estonia⁶³. In that country they have a large group of cyber specialists who are employed by, for example, private or commercial financial institutions to protect those companies and networks. But besides their part-time job they also hold a position as operational reservist, which means they are falling under military rules of engagement. 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.

Therefore we propose:

All member states need to have a common base level when cyber security is concerned. The whole chain is as strong as the weakest link.

There should be created rules on the UN level for cyberwarfare and unmanned (autonomous) systems because the creation of rules lags behind with the ever-changing technology.

Both on the EU and national level it would be worth-while to consider the idea of operational reservist cyberunits as the example of Estonia shows is working well.

This EU cooperation should be based on common values.

Anti-terrorism

The ECPM has been very consistent in voicing that terrorism can only be dealt with effectively if it is dealt with at its roots. The ECPM has for example been calling for support for The Federation of Northern Syria to defeat ISIS not just militarily but also in terms of its mentality. Ultimately any form of terrorism starts with extremist ideology that encourages violence as a means to achieve political goals. This ideology thrives in an environment that is permissive towards this type of extremism. In the 70's and 80's of the 20th century this permissive attitude was present among leftist circles. Today

we see that same permissive attitude among sections of the Islamic environment. This demonstrates the need to promote both at home and abroad a culture that respects human dignity and fundamental freedoms. The fight against terrorism in Europe cannot be disconnected from foreign policy and the need to set new priorities there as well.

There is however a number of steps that can be set in the EU, in the cooperation between member states and in the member states.

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.

All existing EU level structures that deal with terrorism 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 implicated.

Effective cross-border training of civil servants and officers in police and justice departments can be increased.

An effective exchange between EU member states of data regarding terror suspects or those in connection with them as well as extremist preachers is a clear priority.

Member states with large presence of communities from the MENA region could consider developing similar guidelines with regard to (religious) leaders who are strongly connected to third countries.

Effective monitoring of refugee streams and developing strategies inside asylum centres is done most effective in cooperation with those member states that are most affected.

Promoting equal human dignity and fundamental freedoms and their acceptance in all forms of integration policies is key to end any form of permissive attitude towards terrorism.

It is crucial that communities from MENA and Central-Asia clearly understand that these freedoms are conditional for acceptance and that these fundamental freedoms overrule cultural norms from their own background.

The presence via 'front organisations' of entities that support extremist islamist groups need to be countered and ended.

Cooperation with moderate Islamic scholars is necessary in demonstrating that extremism is a wrong and harmful interpretation of Islam.

Fighting Modern Slavery

Modern slavery is a de-humanizing act that reduces people to trading objects. It distorts relations and severely hurts people, making it a difficult process to re-establish new healthy relationships. A majority 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 have to act now.

Forced Labour

Around 40,3 million people around the world were victims of human trafficking in 2016 according to the global estimates of the International Labour Organization. Of these 40,3 million victims, 25 million were in forced labour. It is fair to say that we have all eaten food or have in our possession clothes that have been produced by enslaved labourers. Most of the victims are women (28,7 million). According to the International Labour Organization, women and girls constitute 99 percent of victims of forced labour and sex trafficking.³²

Another category of exploited workers concerns those travelling to work from eastern European countries to the richer countries of northern Europe and are exploited. A recent report with the title *"The employment rights of domestic workers, especially women in Europe"*³³ brought to light the bad conditions domestic workers find themselves into. It was underlined that they usually have a precarious labour status being often underpaid or undeclared and not covered by labour legislation. The report estimated that there are around 2.2 million migrant domestic workers living in Europe although this figure is likely to be higher. According to this report, on many cases employers take advantage of the vulnerable position of the people seeking employment. On the other hand, because these workers need work, they are ready to make serious compromises for the chance to improve their living conditions and those of their families left at home.

Their problematic condition is exacerbated by differences in the legislation of member states and the absence of any European regulation on the matter. As a result, they often must work long hours for low wages have to live sometimes in very bad conditions. Those that come from countries outside the EU are in a more precarious condition because of restrictive immigration-sponsorship policies that link their visas to their employers. As a result, employers control a worker's immigration status and ability to change jobs, and sometimes whether the worker can return home.

The record number of refugees because of the turmoil in the Middle East (an issue outlined in detail in chapter 4 and 5 of this election manifesto) has provided traffickers a new opportunity for exploitation. Especially one must consider the fact that at least 300,000 unaccompanied and separated children were recorded in 80 countries in 2015-16, a rise of almost 500% on the 66,000 documented in 2010-2011, according to a UNICEF report published in May 2017.³⁴

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 at those sectors that have a high risk of exploitation (for example, textile, agriculture and tourism sectors). All companies, regardless of whether they operate in one European country or they are transnational companies should be held accountable in case of human rights abuses in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.³⁵ 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 must compile a list of companies that 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.

In May 2017, a bill was adopted in the Dutch Parliament obliging companies to take measures to prevent child labour. It requires companies selling goods and services to Dutch end-users to determine whether child labour occurs in their supply chains. If so, companies must set out a plan of action on how to combat it and issue a declaration on their investigation and plan of action. If they don't comply, they risk a fine up to a maximum of EUR 820,000 or, alternatively, 10% of their annual turnover.³⁶ Other member states could introduce similar legislation.

Additionally, mechanisms should be developed in each member state for the enforcement of anti – forced labour legislation and the discouragement of harassment and exploitation of vulnerable employees. Finally, Member States should be encouraged to partner with the business communities so that common action is taken against forced labour as well as employee harassment and intimidation. 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 that 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.

On the issue of domestic workers from eastern European countries, ECPM believes that the EU should set up a platform for international exchange and co-operation 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.

As far as the protection of unaccompanied children Europe is concerned, we firmly believe that the EU member states should cooperate on supporting 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.

Trafficking and sexual exploitation

According to the first report on the implementation of the 2011 anti-trafficking Directive, 15846 victims of human trafficking have been recorded in the EU between 2013 and 2014. 76% of them were women and children. Two thirds of the registered victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation.³⁷ The profits from sex trafficking are enormous. According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimations, \$28 billion out of the \$32 billion profits from trafficking, come from sex trafficking.³⁸ It is therefore easy to deduce that there can be no effective response to human trafficking without addressing the problem of prostitution.

There are different approaches to prostitution across Europe³⁹. In some European countries, prostitution is legal, and prostitutes are recognized as workers. These countries are Austria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia and Netherlands. In other countries, it is illegal to purchase sexual services but there are protection mechanisms in place for those who sell sexual services. This approach, because it originated from Nordic countries is widely known as the Nordic Model. This model is now implemented in France, Northern Ireland, Norway, the Republic of Ireland and Sweden. In other countries, prostitution is not legal but certain activities are (for example pimping and the running of brothels). This legal framework is in place in Belgium, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta, Moldova, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey. Finally, prostitution is illegal in Russia, Romania and Albania.

The countries that criminalized prostitution have witnessed many negative implications in the safety and the wellbeing of women as well as a high chance for 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 degraded⁴⁰. Additionally, only a small minority of municipalities (6%) offered an exit program to prostitutes. The Dutch House of Representatives voted for a bill that criminalizes clients of prostitutes if they are known victims of human trafficking.⁴¹ It is currently under discussion in the senate.

Following the example of the Netherlands, the German government passed a law in 2002 that decriminalized prostitution. This law led to a spike in the number of prostitutes in the country. A German government report on this law concluded that this law did not make the sex industry safer for women⁴². Another report by indicates that not only the German law did not improve the living conditions of people in prostitution, but it also triggered an increase in sex trafficking.⁴³ After these disappointing results, the German government passed a new law in 2016 that calls for those who pay for sex with victims of forced prostitution to be imprisoned for up to 5 years.⁴⁴

On the other hand, the countries that followed the Nordic Model witnessed many positive results. A report 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 has been decreased mainly because of a fear for penalties⁴⁵.

Other European countries have also followed this model. In January 2015, A new “Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill” was introduced to the Northern Ireland Assembly in June 2013 and became a law in January 2015⁴⁶. This law makes it a criminal offence to purchase sexual services in Northern

Ireland while it decriminalizes those who provide them. In April 2016 French National Assembly criminalized the purchase of sex in France. Under this law, prostituted people will be decriminalized and men who are caught buying sex will be subject to fines. It will also allow prostitution victims to act as witnesses themselves without being charged with an offence. Moreover, the bill promises that around 5 million dollars per year will go into prevention as well as exiting and support services⁴⁷. Moreover, on February 2017, a new law was passed in the Republic of Ireland that criminalizes the purchaser of sexual services rather than the seller. There were also provisions that make it easier for the victims of sexual offences to come forward and testify⁴⁸. The Nordic model has also been introduced in non – European countries. In Israel, both the Ministerial Committee and Knesset (Israeli Parliament) adopted in its first reading unanimously a legislative proposal to criminalize those who purchase sexual services and a project to reintegrate prostitutes in the society. The legislation will only be law after two more readings⁴⁹.

A report adopted in 2014 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe with the title *“Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery in Europe”*⁵⁰ calls for the banning of the advertising of sexual services, including forms of disguised advertising. Moreover, a report adopted by the European Parliament in February 2014 with the title *“Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality”*⁵¹ calls for the criminalization of clients seeing it as the only prostitution policy that successfully combats human trafficking. It is also argued that decriminalization of prostitution puts women in danger of a higher level of violence and calls member states to examine the criminalization of the purchasing of sexual services and its effect on reducing prostitution. The same view was expressed in the 2014 Council of Europe report that called the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services as the *“most effective tool for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings”*.⁵²

On an EU level, the 2011/36/EU Directive on trafficking in human beings⁵³ calls for victim protection as well as for the prevention of human trafficking in parallel to its criminalization. In fact, article 26 of the anti-trafficking Directive requires from member states to criminalize the use of sexual services with the knowledge that the person is a victim of human trafficking.

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. We therefore should criminalize the purchase of sexual services completely across Europe following the examples of Sweden, France, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

ECPM believes that that a ban on advertising of sexual services is feasible on an EU level. Moreover, the EU institutions should actively oversee the implementation of the 2011 Directive.

On a member state level, the 2011 Directive needs to be implemented in the different member states as a minimal way on discouraging the demand for sexual services. However, in order to effectively combat human trafficking, demand should be completely criminalized. Additionally, we urge member states to implement awareness programs through the media and school education that will raise awareness of the link between prostitution and human trafficking. Finally, training programs for law enforcement officials, the judiciary, social workers and public health professionals can play an important role in raising awareness.

Finally, we believe specialized police forces for the enforcement of prostitution and human trafficking regulations should be established in all member states. These forces will be responsible for the strict monitoring of brothels and other similar establishments in countries where prostitution is still legal. They should also be trained in the identification of trafficking victims and in the implementation of

exit programs that should always accompany any prohibition of the purchase of sexual services. The criminalization of clients must go hand in hand with the establishment of exit programs for prostitutes. Otherwise, there is a danger that prostitutes will start working illegally. They should therefore be offered a chance to leave prostitution and reintegrate into society. For example, the new French law on prostitution that was introduced in 2016 allows prostitutes to benefit from protection and assistance through a state funded exit program.⁵⁴

The EU can foster cooperation among member states through the “*EU Strategy on the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings*”.⁵⁵ Funds from this programme should be used to provide the police but also the agencies responsible for exit programmes in each member state with adequate resources. 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.

Reforming the European Union

The European Union needs serious reform. Not only technically but also spiritually. 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. The European Union must start to under-promise and over-deliver instead of doing the exact opposite. To many, the EU has become as problem-causer instead of a problem-solver. This view might not be true, but it does stick in the minds of many citizens. 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 as 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. By cooperation we secure peace for our citizens, stability, economic growth and cultural exchange. Together, in all our diversity, we are stronger and more able to help others and our climate. Together we can be strong partners to other regions in the world. Together, we can make a difference.

The roots of the European Union can be read the best from the preamble of the European Coal and Steel Agreement (ECSA), which formed one of the bases of the nowadays European Union. The ECSA was motivated to “help, by expanding their basic production, to raise the standard of living and further the works of peace” and as a “substitute for age-old rivalries the 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”. Robert Schuman, who first proposed the European Coal and Steel Community, was convinced that Europe was “deeply rooted in Christian values”.

The phrase of an “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. Brexit, the ongoing financial problems regarding the euro and the deplorable situation of Greece show that political and financial structures can cause a bigger divide instead of an ever-closer union.

ECPM believes we need to reform / back to roots the EU to focus on its core tasks and to reform the EU to make it function differently and better. We call the European Union to go back to its spiritual, cultural and civilizational roots and core motivation and not to 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.

Since the treaty of Maastricht of 1993, which reformed the European Economic Community into the European Community, more and more competences shifted from the member states to the EU. A group of European leaders started to believe in ‘a more united Europe’, without taking their citizens along. In the past years, citizens show more and more their frustration with this process. Most Europeans agree that it is very important to cooperate. At the same time, they don’t feel European as the cultural differences between the member states and regions are too big. The Brexit and the rising of populism are good examples of these feelings.

Reset: more control and involvement by national parliaments

ECPM believes that the EU needs to go back to its roots to be able to move forward. The goal should be a constructive community of peoples fostering safety, stability and constructive cooperation. If the European Institutions can facilitate this, support for EU might grow. If they act like an 'alien entity' forcing political and financial rules and legislation upon member states, opposition will grow. More control and required responsibility by national parliaments can decrease the uneasiness that many citizens feel when thinking about Brussels and encourage national assemblies to act with common European conscious. However, more control will also lead to more responsibility for national parliaments to make European cooperation work. Blaming Brussels is not a real option anymore when you have real influence over its business.

To be focused on a European Community instead of a Union, is withdrawing the right of initiative of the European Commission (EC). Only on those areas where the EU has full competence: international trade, fair competition within EU, monetary issues related to the Eurozone and the customs union, shall the EC keep this right of initiative. Apart from these areas the EC will have a directing and coordinating function on the initiatives of the member states. The European Council and Council of the European Union will review and check the work of the EC. This limiting of competencies will also allow decreasing of the budget of the European administration.

The role of national parliaments needs to be reinvigorated. Any decision that would strip member states from their sovereignty should be accepted by at least 2/3 majorities in national parliaments. The 'red card' procedure negotiated by David Cameron should be slightly altered to really become an effective check of national parliaments. If 50% of national parliaments disagree with EU legislation than this legislation should be revoked automatically. This will encourage national parliaments to safeguard the basic principles of the EU, the competences and the subsidiarity principle.

Reform: from one-size-fits-all to facilitating national needs

A one-size-fits-all approach might make sense when you start a project with six countries, it does not when you have twenty-eight countries (after Brexit twenty-seven). *The Economist* puts it very clearly when it stated in its March 2017 edition that "The EU must embrace greater differentiation or face potential disintegration."⁵⁶ The publication of ECPM's foundation, *Sallux* together with *Relational Research* opts for a "confederal Europe (that) proposes neither a withdrawal from the European project nor a headlong and premature rush towards full political integration."⁵⁷

A sustainable future for European cooperation is not helped with a one-speed or two-speed Europe. Currently the twenty-eight members are all part of the single market, twenty-one 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 and the eurozone is currently coping with serious flaws of which one is the diversity in economies that it represents. Furthermore, countries like Romania and Bulgaria are not part of the Schengen zone because of serious doubts of the other members about their ability to protect and secure the outer border of the EU.

So, diversity is already a reality. Instead of institutionally combating it (regardless of the consequences), it is better to facilitate it in a way that improves relations between countries and de facto creating a closer union of peoples in Europe. A confederal structure of the EU would give space

to a looser but better European Union. Apart from this, different does not have to mean less. Member states can act more effectively together on issues of economic divergence if their economies are more similar and their preferences not adversative.

Regional initiatives of cultural, historic or economical common ground should be welcome. Smaller groups of states can represent important contribution in shaping future of the EU. For example, V4, Benelux, Baltic Countries - they can also provide partial answers to Plan B in case the EU project fails.

Another reform that needs to take place is the removal of European entities or agencies that have not added value as they operate outside the EU competencies and inside national competences. For example, the Economic and Social Committee and Committee of Regions can be removed and there also needs to be a critical view on the several European agencies that pop up everywhere in Europe without a clear goal or use. Criteria for European agencies should be subsidiarity, economics and pan-European cooperation.

EU neighbourhood policy over EU accession

It would be best for the European Union to give more possibilities for partnerships with non-EU countries without directly pursuing membership. This would create more European cooperation and cohesion as it expands the options: the EU will not be limited to just a yes or a no to a country that wants to join the EU. It is clear that in the current situation, expansion of the European Union is unadvisable. Therefore, ECPM applauds options such as association agreements to provide privileges without actual membership. Political deals on the schedule for full membership cannot be made anymore: Only countries that fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria can become a member. One country that should never become part of the EU is Turkey, since it fulfils less and less criteria regarding the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Any form of partnership can be discussed but only when Turkey starts respecting fundamental freedoms as freedom of press, freedom of religion and freedom and protection for minorities.

However, the EU has a special relation with its direct neighbours in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, countries which belong to the EU neighbourhood policy. The EU should be a good neighbour and help these countries as many of them are on the long-term moving towards possible membership. Special focus in this is helping with the further development of democracy, rule of law and cross-border cooperation. However, by doing so the EU should respect the values and integrity of the neighbouring countries.

Facilitate and orchestrate cooperation

An effective and decisive European Union is much needed especially on issues like energy safety, and security. On these matters, cooperation is vital and member states need to accept the role of the EU as facilitator and orchestrator of better border protection, as a dynamic force for sustainable energy and coordinator of European security. Especially on these interconnected and transnational issues, the member states need to express solidarity and a constructive attitude.

The European Union also needs to play a role in forming clear rules regarding tax havens and the taxation of multinationals, not allowing that they can play out one European country against the other. Transparent and fair rules need to be made and the European Institutions will be key in facilitating and monitoring this. When the European Parliament and European Commission would

manage to really act like an objective arbiter regarding these matters, without the agenda of pushing for more political integration, it can have the added value that it was meant for.

It is important to note that in this the EU should not view itself as the solution to each problem and therefore advocate more EU anytime a problem arises. The problems in Europe (inside and outside EU) can only be solved by sovereign states. However, the EU can be a key instrument in facilitating and achieving real sustainable solutions.

Review legislation and improve relations

To keep this EU flexible, diverse and effective, it is important to monitor effectiveness 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.

The inept response of both EU and members states in response to the sudden increase of immigration to the EU shows a need for updating legislation and downgrading ambitions when needed. EU directives do not really solve or address a "European" problem should be withdrawn. A concrete example of this is the controversial Equal Treatment Directive that 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 as was made clear by the handling of the European Commission of the 'One of Us' initiative. 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.

A more compact EU will lead to more a valued and accepted EU. A person who condemns you and tells you what to do will never become a real friend, a person that offers his assistance will. This is the attitude that the European Institutions should have. If the quality of relationships between countries improves, the EU improves. When the relationship between the European Parliament and national parliaments improves, the EU improves. Improving these relations will be key to have an effective strategy against the deconstructive ideology of far-left and far-right wing parties.

Finally, a realistic view on the EU means having a plan B or at least have a strategy if plan A fails. The Brexit vote of 2016 made clear that neither the United Kingdom nor the European Union really had a strategy what to do if the British people voted for Brexit. Too often EU officials and pro-European leaders simply counter questions about worst case scenario's with "that will not happen." Brexit has made clear that this argument is not valid anymore. We need to have worst case scenarios and exit criteria for the EU, for Schengen and for the eurozone.

Preserving Christian Culture & Heritage

We believe that the Christian culture embeds fundamental freedoms that are virtuous for European societies. Eroding the Christian culture and heritage in Europe will lead to more division, violence and insecurity. History has shown what happens in societies that (try to) abolish religion. A culture that always sees life as God-given will always value life. Europe has been shaped by Christianity and has been a Christian continent for over a millennium. Without any exception, all EU members were already Christian before becoming a nation state. The majority of the founding fathers of the EU were Christians. We believe that the EU should be proud of its Christian roots and that Christian culture and heritage should be preserved. Key aspects of this culture are freedom, love, truth, reconciliation and respect for life. Europe has become a diverse continent which it can remain only when everyone respects the view and faith of the other. For this reason, we are weary of secular anti-religious ideologies that want to remove the heritage of Christian thinking and play down its relevance. For the same reason, we are opposing EU membership of Turkey which has a different cultural background and different values.

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. It is among the most fundamental civil rights.⁴ For the ECPM, these are basic rights of the highest importance. 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 is a right that covers many distinct, yet interrelated rights. For example, it entails the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching worship and observance. It is also connected with the rights of parents to ensure the religion and moral education of their children but also with the right to establish and maintain institutions that operate on a distinct ethos.⁵ Freedom of religion is a fundamental right, enshrined not only in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5)⁶ and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷, but also in many national, international and European instruments.

Additionally, freedom of speech is protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union⁸ and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Finally, the right to freedom of conscience is protected by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁹, Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Freedom of religion around the world

Today, Christians are the most persecuted religion in the world. According to the latest report by Open Doors International, one out of twelve Christians experiences serious persecution. Moreover, 30 from the 50 countries on the World Watch List feature an increase of the amount of persecution. Of the 393 million Christians in Asia, one out of four is being persecuted¹¹. These latest findings confirm a sad trend manifested in the past few years. In 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a report condemning the actions of ISIS in the Middle East as genocide. The resolution¹² reminded member states that they have an obligation under international law to prevent genocide as well as prevent

their own nationals from taking part in such acts". A Resolution of the European Parliament on *"the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'"* also characterized the actions of ISIS against Christians and Yazidis as genocide.¹³ Moreover, 2015 was remembered as the year that was the most violent for Christians in Modern History¹⁴. Over 7000 Christians were killed for faith related reasons. Additionally, around 2400 churches were attacked or damaged.

Of course, Christians are not the only ones being persecuted. According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Buddhists are persecuted in China and Vietnam and Muslims are persecuted in several countries especially in Eritrea, Sri Lanka and India¹⁵. 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. For example, Muslims as well as believers of other religions should enjoy full protection of their right to worship. However, at the same time, each religious community should embrace the same principles towards others and refrain from imposing regulations that are not compatible with democratic principles like the Sharia law. In 2003, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that "the rules of Shariah are incompatible with a democratic regime"¹⁶.

According to the Global Charter of Conscience which is a declaration supporting Freedom of Religion, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion contains a duty as well as a right. A right for one person is automatically a right for the other and a responsibility of both.¹⁷ We therefore feel that each person has the right to manifest his/her beliefs but also, we have a duty to protect this right for everyone.

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. The PACE report on *"Tackling Intolerance and Discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians"*¹⁸ 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. Moreover, many acts of hostility, violence and vandalism have been recorded in recent years against Christians and their places of worship, but these acts are often overlooked by the national authorities. The report added that *"the expression of faith is sometimes unduly limited by national legislation and policies which do not allow the accommodation of religious beliefs and practices"*. Additionally, Christians in some member states are harassed while publicly promoting and defending religious values, including traditional marriage. Moreover, some Christians have been investigated, suspended or dismissed from work for wearing religious symbols in the workplace in violation of their right to manifest religion in public. On other occasions registrars were dismissed from their employment for refusing to officiate same-sex marriages. Finally, the report referred to limitations put in some European countries to the right of parents to opt their child out of individual classes or an entire course that 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.

On other occasions, Christian doctors who do not want to perform abortions are 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 law¹⁹. The conscientious objection of medical staff was protected in the PACE report on *"The right to conscientious objection in lawful medical care"*.²⁰ There are also challenges to freedom of education, especially to the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their philosophical convictions. This is a right enshrined in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights²¹ as well as in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.²² A 2017 report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on

*“The protection of the rights of parents and children belonging to religious minorities”*²³ made special reference to many instances when this right was not respected 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.

All abovementioned PACE reports underline the importance of the concept of conscientious objection and reasonable accommodation as a tool 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 relations 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 Directive on equal treatment in employment²⁴ 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 Directive²⁵ 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.

Dangerous developments on FORB in Europe

In the past few years, the EU attempted to widen the scope of the so – called “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”*²⁶ 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 limit both the freedom of contract (which represents the basis of civil law) and personal autonomy. It would also have imposed an undue bureaucratic burden on businesses. Finally, it would have negative implications on freedom of religion or belief in Europe. It would not have allowed citizens to refuse to provide goods and services when doing so would be a direct violation of their reasonably held religious beliefs. Therefore, this Directive would have created irresolvable moral conflicts for religious believers, by forcing them to choose between their business and their belief.

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 guidelines *“on the promotion and protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief”*. In these guidelines²⁷, 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 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 pointed in their last Annual Interim Report²⁸ that they are still waiting for a “full report” on the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief. They also underlined that hardly any of the 2016 recommendations to the European External Action Service were implemented adding that there is also a lack of transparency between the Intergroup, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Council and the Commission. EU Institutions should therefore actively address these shortcomings and embed Freedom of Religion or Belief in their policies. The appointment of Jan Figel in 2016 as Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU²⁹ is a positive first step to this direction. However, we believe that he 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 enhance the visibility and effectiveness of his role.

On the domestic front, the EU should therefore refrain from pursuing legislative initiatives that do not respect the principle of subsidiarity. It should also concretely recognize the role faith-based organizations, give them more freedom and allow them to operate according to their founding principles. In this respect, the example of the Netherlands is very useful. Two types of schools exist in the Netherlands: state schools and “special” schools which comprise denominational schools and neutral or general schools (for example Montessori schools). Special schools represent two thirds of schools in the Netherlands. They are all state-funded and enjoy a high level of autonomy in choosing the pedagogical content and their teachers. Religious schools are also allowed, to recruit teachers in accordance with their religious beliefs³⁰.

Finding the fine lines between professional obligations and ethical principles remains a challenge. However, ECPM believes that no parent or physician or faith-based institution can be discriminated against for acting according to their deeply held beliefs. Moreover, the inclusion of ethno-religious minorities in all spheres of public life should be a priority. Therefore, EU member states should be encouraged to enable their citizens to fully manifest their religion or belief in private or in public, making use of the concept of reasonable accommodation³¹.