

# EU CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

## SUBMISSION BY FAITH IN EUROPE

### 1 Faith in Europe

Faith in Europe is a British and Irish network of individuals and faith community organisations focussing on European issues and contacts. Its approach to the Conference on the Future of Europe has been to enable discussions to take place between people of faith and to collect the issues and ideas coming out of those discussions.

These ideas come from members of faith communities. We believe that faith groups have an important role as interpreters of the EU's activities in their own constituencies, and vice versa, and that the EU should actively encourage this bridge-building.

Faith in Europe held an online consultation on 21 October 2021. This brought together a group of concerned citizens linked to faith communities. To honour the spirit of the Conference Charter, five preliminary meetings took place online and the results of these, and other preliminary papers, can be found in the reports of meetings before the consultation (link below). In the same spirit, a large part of the consultation took place in small groups of up to six people, the results of which were presented to and discussed by the whole group of participants.

### 2 Our Starting Point

The starting point of the discussion was a paper entitled *A Vision for Europe* adopted by Faith in Europe in 2019 and available in long and short versions on the 'Our Vision' page of the Faith in Europe website. It identified and developed six principles which should be at the heart of future European development including the evolution of the European Union. These were:

**Service:** The EU brings nations together on a voluntary and largely consensual basis rather than by force and conquest and should serve them by providing a platform of justice and law. This implies that some of its institutions may need more political control.

**Solidarity:** A feeling of common identity. This already applies to citizens with common experiences in politics, education, faith and working life, but not to those who find supra-national rather than national loyalties foreign to them. Demagogic leaders have used this division as a basis for populist policies. The EU could aim more to share burdens, to enhance a civil society that faces up to common problems, to dethrone the worship of markets, and above all to engender trust. Younger members of the community may have most to offer here.

**Subsidiarity:** A principle recognised in theory by the EU but not always in practice, seen as a way to avoid the imposition of rules that would be better adapted to local cultures and circumstances. Freedom to take local decisions will enhance self-respect among local people.

**Stewardship:** The faith-based view that Christian values and those shared with other faiths need guardianship, and the EU is well-placed to exercise this. The EU can offer inspiration not only to its member states but to candidate countries and to others outside its borders.

**Security:** A need that the EU as a peace project has always set out to meet, and not by its own force of arms. The EU's concern for the whole of Ireland in the 'Brexit' context exemplifies this. The EU is and can be a pacesetter for the rest of the world.

**Sustainability:** confronting climate change and environmental degradation. The EU has a status and economic weight to achieve more than any independent nation. It can recognise the need for right investment, for the employment of its population, and for the management of energy problems. It can highlight the plight and problems in these fields for the world's poor.

### **3 Issues Identified by the Consultation**

**Climate change/climate justice:** We saw the climate crisis as overwhelmingly important, not simply because of the topicality of COP-26 in Glasgow, which was to begin later in the same month, but because of its critical importance for the whole planet. It reflects the need for sustainability and stewardship. Europe has a special responsibility in this field because European industrialisation was one of the root causes of global warming. That special responsibility should be reflected not only in bold target setting but also in the EU's promotion of and support for effective measures to counter the effects of

climate change and to help make life worth living in developing countries affected by climate change. Churches and religious communities can play a key role in raising awareness of this issue, as they have done in relation to vaccination against Ebola and Covid-19. The EU should encourage religious communities in this role and in formulating well thought-out analyses of the issue.

**Migration:** The EU needs to pursue an enlightened migration policy, which balances any perceived need for security with solidarity and service and which recognises that war, persecution, poverty, population growth and climate change drive people to travel, often at great risk, to Europe. It should acknowledge Europe's responsibility for migration situations: climate change, arms sales, our prosperity based on resources stolen from the 'developing world'. It is also too easy to try to distinguish economic migrants and refugees. The issue requires sharing of prosperity and justice through a generosity in framing and applying rules and through equitable trade and development aid policies aiming to make the lives of would-be migrants more worth living. Bearing in mind the heavy burden borne by the states which receive direct arrivals, generosity is also needed in the response of all EU member states so that there is an appropriate sharing of tasks throughout the EU.

**Human dignity:** There is a considerable and growing problem with personal and political hate speech, particularly in the context of social media. Social media companies have become immensely powerful, yet they are virtually unregulated and untaxed. The EU has the capacity to address this in a way that individual countries cannot. Policies to confront misogyny, violence against women and the dilution of LGBT+ rights also need to be brought into public focus.

**Democratic deficit:** A disconnect exists between EU institutions and many ordinary citizens; there has been a failure to address this. How far has this led to the rise of far-right populism? Serious work needs to be done to make this element of subsidiarity a reality. The EU institutions would benefit from making a self-critical assessment of why the UK voted to leave the EU. One piece of democratic deficit is that the Northern Ireland Protocol agreed between the EU and the UK makes Northern Ireland subject to many Single Market rules but the people of Northern Ireland have no voice in that regulation.

**The need to engage more intensely with the other multilateral instruments in Europe, notably the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe and the Vienna-based OSCE:** This is important for people in Britain because the United Kingdom remains a member of these bodies. Through its Council of Europe membership, it also adheres to the European Convention on Human Rights and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. These memberships enable continuing contact between the UK, the EU member states and the EU itself.

**Recovering European Ideals:** We see a need to revive European ideals: a contemporary imagining of Jacques Delors' quest for a "Soul of Europe", in which he urged faith communities to participate. The EU has not yet fully understood how much faith groups give to civic society. Nor has it understood how to deal with the cultural/religious mix which, if handled badly, can lead to the exploitation of religion by populist groups. The EU needs to collaborate with faith groups (as well as civil society as a whole) as part of the endeavour to recover a sense of direction and purpose. We hope to see Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty more fully deployed, not simply as something which operates only through religious leaders meeting EU leaders but in a way which draws on and takes account of the experience of people from local faith communities. The EU must learn how to address faith communities and faith communities need to do likewise in respect of the EU.

#### **4 What are the Priority Issues?**

There was a clear consensus among participants that the issues are interconnected – particularly focusing on the first three topics: Climate Change/Justice, Migration and Human Dignity. There was almost unanimous agreement that the challenges of climate change and migration are deeply important and that the responses to the issues could even become existential threats to the future of Europe. The EU needs to take a lead on joined-up international thinking that focuses on future planning rather than firefighting.

A key priority was how to give a soul of Europe and renew European values; one group identified that this directly speaks to the founding of the EU and perhaps how the collective challenges that faced us in 1950 have dramatically changed from the nationalistic/military/imperial environment then towards one of climate crisis, economics and migration in 2021. Recognising that change and responding to it could be the key to a new narrative, to take forward and develop for our times, the concepts presented by Robert

Schuman and Jacques Delors. Could this be *Planning for a Sustainable Future Together?*

*United in diversity* has been used as the motto of the EU since 2000 and we would like to see this motto used as an opportunity for learning, growth and celebration within the overall values of the EU rather than a mere toleration of diversity.

So, we, as people of faith, see as Priority Issues:

- Trust; multiple identities; neighbourliness; meeting our neighbours in person – hence cherishing civil society of which we are part.
- The common good rather than the balancing of interests.
- Listening to and engaging with the younger generation.
- The wider world – where the European Union, and Europeans generally, can show the way:
  - World health – with COVID in mind
  - World equality of opportunity so that no one must migrate to find peace and freedom
  - But, above all else, climate and the future of the planet.

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