



Open Letter to the Candidates for the Elections to the European Parliament 2014

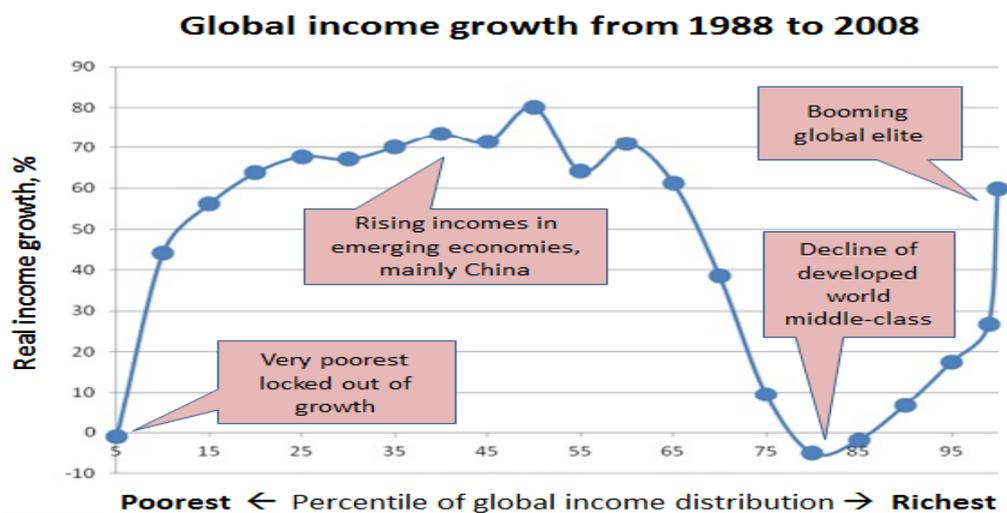
We, the members of the Christian Life Community in Europe would like to address you as a candidate of the forthcoming European Parliament elections. We bring to you our concerns and issues as citizens of the EU.

We are a world community present in five continents and over 60 countries. We are committed lay Christians drawing our membership from all walks of life, professions and of all social conditions. Our charism and spirituality is Ignatian. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are both the specific source of our charism and the defining instrument of CLC spirituality. Our way of life is simple and in solidarity with the poor, integrating contemplation and action in all things, living lives of love and service in the Church and society. A defining characteristic of the spirituality we treasure is the fact that we strive hard to find God in all things, as the founder of this spirituality (St. Ignatius of Loyola) teaches in his spiritual exercises.

Globalisation and the Poor

There are people willing to die to enter and form part of Europe (as the sad events of the Ukraine and the Mediterranean demonstrate). We, as Europeans, in front of so much human drama must feel even more urgently the moral duty to fight the current European economic crisis and improve the European civil society by strengthening aspects related to solidarity, environmental sustainability and to fight poverty on the global economic stage.

Global economic results in terms of the fight against poverty and inequality are mixed. Even though in the last ten years we welcomed the rising income in emerging economies (approximately 70% growth for the those in the middle of the global income distribution), the poorest remain locked out of this growth and their distance from the booming global elite (plus 60% income in the last decade) widened. While this was happening we witnessed the decline of the developed world middle class (most of it in Europe) which is competing with low wage workers from emerging countries. All these changes imply that we are moving away from the twin-peaked distribution of global income (the rich and the poor) to a unimodal distribution with an emerging middle class (that is still poor with a daily income of USD3 to USD16) and the growing inequality between the richest and the poorest. This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated by the shocking fact that the 85 richest individuals have an income equal to that of the poorest 3.5 billion individuals; the richest 1% of the population owns €81,000 billion which is 65 times the wealth of the poorest half of the planet!



In order to avoid the decline of the developed working middle class; to reduce this morally unacceptable inequality and lift lives of the poorest out of their misery and marginalization, in a framework of environmentally sustainable development, we propose that Europe acts on three important issues:

- i) strengthening trust and solidarity among member countries with new fiscal rules;
- ii) creating trade rules which stimulate social and environmental sustainability and bottom up convergence mechanisms in order to avoid that trade liberalization becomes a race to the bottom in terms of worker rights and environmental rules;
- iii) promote a reform of the financial system to avoid that new systemic crises may slash the EU budget in order to bring the immense energies of the financial system to service the common good;

On point i) the actual crisis of the EU is the result of the insufficient reciprocal trust among different member countries. There are no examples of federal states where members with different languages and culture have entered in this highest degree of cooperation and mutual solidarity. This is why our challenge is hard but cannot be missed.

In order to move in that direction we need a step forward from all sides. Countries in surplus need to direct these resources toward investment aimed at strengthening productivity and internal demand of countries where economic growth is slackening. Monetary policies of the EU must be more directly oriented to fight unemployment as is happening on the other side of the Atlantic. Rules of fiscal cooperation need to be re-discussed since the commitment of Southern Eurozone countries to heavily reduce their government debt under deflation becomes almost impossible and is going to produce new tensions and crises.

On point ii) free trade is not an end in itself but a means to move ahead towards the common good. We must therefore avoid that it can trigger a race to the bottom on worker rights and environmental sustainability, while we must work to create rules which promote a bottom up (and not a top down) convergence. This is why the EU, following the path of the Social Business Initiative,¹ must create rules which provide preferential taxation for value chains with higher social and environmental sustainability. A crucial step in this direction is the definition of procurement rules which fix minimal thresholds of environmental and social sustainability for companies.

On point iii) a recent IMF working paper (Laeven and Valencia, 2011) calculates that the global financial crisis has produced on average an increase higher than 30 percent of the debt/GDP ratio in

¹http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/social_business/index_en.htm.

Europe with peaks of 70 points in Iceland and Ireland and with more than 20 percent points in Greece, Germany, United Kingdom, Belgium and the Netherlands.

All these resources have been removed from potentially useful destinations in health, education and the fight against poverty and marginalization and instead have produced a remarkable step back in the promotion of wellbeing in the EU. It is our utmost duty to avoid that this may happen again. To this purpose we propose: a) the separation between commercial and investment banking as suggested in the (EU commission of experts) Liikanen and Vickers (UK commission of experts) reports in order to avoid that financial resources provided by the ECB are channelled toward speculative trades instead of supporting households and real economy; b) a financial transaction tax following the will of the EU Parliament which voted in favour of the European FTT (487 out of 685 votes) on May 23rd, 2012 and of the EU public opinion (the Eurobarometer showed that 66 percent of the Europeans were in favour of the tax). In this respect we support the EU FTT project implemented by a subset of 11 member states who started the "enhanced cooperation" procedure on 12 October 2012.² According to EU estimates the tax could result in up to 35 billion euro resources to the EU budget to promote global justice and environmental sustainability; c) a radical change in the remuneration system of CEOs in financial companies creating both a limit between the maximum and minimum pay within these organizations and substantially reforming the current mechanisms of variable incentives (bonuses, stock options) by which managers gain in case of high stock markets while not paying any cost in case of company default. These mechanisms are at the root of the excessive risk taking strategies which enhances the fragility of these organizations and of the same financial system.

Last but not least, tax evasion and tax dodging cost 1000 billion euros annually in the EU, enhancing inequality and undermining the principle of justice. Part of this is due to the lack of tax harmonization within the same EU. We therefore ask, in accordance with the Christian Aid tax justice campaign³ that the new EU parliament promote tax harmonisation and fight tax dodging via trade mispricing by implementing country by country reporting,⁴ by contrasting effectively money laundering⁵ and by enforcing transparency rules such as beneficial ownership in all member countries.⁵

The Environment

Humanity is at a unique crossroads in which the awareness of increased environmental degradation through human intervention can be offset and mitigated. Humanity must be willing to radically change direction and through the application of innovative technological advances reverse the damage already caused to the living planet.

The world is facing innumerable environmental challenges, of which the most pressing are the following:

1. ***Offsetting the greenhouse footprint due to generation:*** Climate model predictions indicate that, even at the current level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, an unprecedented acceleration in climate change is being recorded. We believe that the response to climate change is primarily dependant on steep reductions in all greenhouse gas emissions, chiefly through burning of fossil fuels at an individual, local, regional and national scale. This decrease in dependency on traditional method of energy generation should also work in tandem with increased efforts to offset the effect through responsible geochemical engineering methods;
2. ***Food and water security:*** The shift in weather patterns in Europe and its neighbours are resulting in a clear decrease in security of food and water supplies. The world is dependant on

²<http://europa.eu/newsroom/calendar/event/422088/directive-implementing-enhanced-cooperation-on-the-financial-transactions-tax>

³<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/trace-the-tax/>

⁴http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/accounting/country-reporting/index_en.htm

⁵http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/securities/transparency/index_en.htm

very few types of food, sourced from the same general region. Europe should lead by example in tackling food and water governance and security to its people and at the same time preventing pressures on other developing countries;

3. **Improvement in cityscapes:** The percentage of people living in cities is constantly on the increase, and thus the city's living space is much more sought after as a home. The 2013 Eurobarometer survey on the quality of life in cities has conversely highlighted a number of issues. Improvements in urban planning system requirements are essential not only to combat the heat island effect but also to increase the mental well-being of the majority of the population. Innovative design in buildings, transport and commuter systems, waste infrastructure and drainage all aid in combating the heat island effect and improving the city's amenity. More importantly the actual design layout of cities to include more green space and facilities in which recreation in a clean and healthy environment is possible should feature more prominently on the agenda;

Whereas legislation has a keystone role in determining a government's response to environmental issues, another largely overlooked key factor to combat environmental degradation is education at the micro level. Although laws and policies have a critical role at reaching key players, a larger improvement at ground level needs to be registered. Individuals, families or groups of people living together are still lacking a full appreciation of the current state of affairs of the environment, thinking this is a problem to face tomorrow. These environmental impacts should therefore be made more widely known in simple terms to the general public.

Individuals need be made aware that environmental degradation is a shared responsibility for which we all should take responsibility.

Forced Migrants

For forced migrants and refugees access to Europe is a crucial issue

If the EU is truly committed to putting an end to the tragedy in the Mediterranean, Europe needs **clear rules** on search and rescue operations ensuring that migrants are **not pushed back** when detected, and clearly establish who is **responsible** for rescuing boats in distress. Moreover, people in need of protection must be **identified**, receive proper **assistance** and be able to ask for **international protection** once they arrive to safety. We ask that the highest levels of transparency and respect for Fundamental Human Rights **in all Frontex activities** are guaranteed. We welcome the creation of the Consultative Forum of relevant European and International Fundamental Rights organizations and ask that this Forum may receive the necessary means to monitor the situation at European borders.

EU decision-makers agreed in 2013 on a new Dublin Regulation⁶, which determines the responsible State for an asylum request. It contains significant improvements, but still the heart of the Dublin Regulation (that asylum seekers are transferred to their EU country of first entry) remains unchanged. This is the worst part of the regulation, as it forces refugees to be in countries where they do not want to be. We believe that this needs to be reconsidered such that the responsible State could be the one in which an asylum seeker asks for asylum for the first time. If asylum seekers could choose the country of asylum, due to family links, historical or cultural background, their integration in the host country would be much easier. The cost of the Dublin administrative procedures and transfers could also be avoided.

The **Return Directive** is a cornerstone of the current European legislation. The return policy is a central element of any readmission agreement of the EU with third countries for which they are offered compensation in terms of development aid or better mobility for their nationals. In reality we see that detention as a migration management instrument has clearly failed its purpose. Except for Dublin transfers, most of detained persons cannot be returned to their home country. Alternatives to

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF>

detention exist and we urge the European legislator to introduce these alternatives into the directive and to close all detention centers for asylum seekers across all EU countries.

Regarding the human tragedy in Syria, we urge European politicians to decide upon a Joint EU Resettlement Programme⁷ for those refugees and displaced persons with special needs and to facilitate family reunion of Syrian refugees, comprising also adult sisters and brothers.

Throughout Europe, thousands of migrants are deprived of their basic needs and denied their fundamental human rights. They have little or no access to education, social welfare, housing, healthcare and employment. They are left **destitute** as a consequence of state laws and policies. Their exclusion from society leads to new, invisible, borders that divide local communities, regions and countries. There are undeniably a large number of persons with no legal status or a weak “toleration” status who cannot be returned, for lack of travel documents or for humanitarian reasons, even according to the opinion of the Member State in which they reside and to which they are known. EU states must provide for an environment that protects and upholds the fundamental dignity and rights of people, regardless of their legal status. This includes giving migrants opportunities and support to lift themselves out of destitution.

Solidarity and Diversity

In the year 2000 the EU started to use a motto “unity in diversity”. We in CLC believe in this motto and put it to action within our world community. For the EU this motto should represent how *“Europeans have come together to form the EU to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continents many different cultures, traditions and languages.”*⁸

While we understand and believe in this motto we encourage and urge you to work in favour of this motto by promoting all possible occasions for people across Europe (and beyond) to come together, to listen, share experiences and truly understand the other’s point of view. We in CLC believe that this will be a major step in the direction of giving life to this important European motto. When we start to really open up to “the other” and really understand the other’s point of view, we realise that we cannot make the other like me. We start to understand that our peace and prosperity really lies in understanding the other different cultures and traditions. We come to understand that being different is not a threat to our identity as individuals and states but an advantage. It is an advantage because our identity, traditions and cultures are enriched by the other.

We believe that when this motto is converted from a few nice words into action, we can start to talk, understand and put into action the corollary to this motto...Solidarity. This is a much talked about word in the EU at all levels. Many of us have many definitions of what solidarity means and what shape it should take in practice. We believe that solidarity is not pity or submission. We believe that the key to understand solidarity lies in the understanding and practice of “unity in diversity”. This therefore means that both ad intra and ad extra the EU member states start to truly understand and reach out to the troubles that exist across Europe and the world. One step in this direction was the establishment of the EU Solidarity fund⁹, however while we acknowledge the importance and support that this fund provides within the EU we urge you to look into the management of these funds to ensure that they really reach the people that need them. We also believe that the scope of this fund needs to include (at least) the people of neighbouring countries such as the countries in the Mediterranean or the Balkans. There are many other areas in which we Europeans need to be more active in our solidarity with the other, whoever the other may be and from wherever the other may originate. We urge you to work and strive to leave no stone unturned when acting on issues of solidarity. We pledge that you will find our availability in this.

⁷ http://www.resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/COM%20Joint%20EU%20Resettlement%20Programme_11.06.2012.pdf

⁸ http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/motto/index_en.htm

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/solidarity/index_en.cfm

We believe that when our European motto is put into action we Europeans will truly start to form one Europe made up of many different and diverse individuals. Living in peace together, in true solidarity and unity.

Signed on behalf of CLC in Europe (12,000 members in 18 EU countries)

The CLC Euro-team

Leonard Becchetti (CLC in Italy)

Adelaida La Casta Muñoa (CLC in Spain)

Chris Micallef (CLC in Malta)

Jonathan Henwood (CLC in Malta)

Agnès Rausch (CLC in Luxemburg)