

**newsletter**  
of the Commission of the  
Bishops' Conferences of the EU  
and the Jesuit European Office

# europainfos

christian perspectives on the EU



## Editorial

Michael Kuhn

## Through the eyes of the poor

For its Plenary Assembly from 26 to 28 October 2016, COMECE has chosen to examine the complex issue of poverty in Europe.

There is no doubt that the gulf between rich and poor in Europe is widening. Poverty is on the increase: in 2014, there were 119 million Europeans threatened with poverty, and the trend is growing. It affects individual Member States, where people in precarious situations are put under increasing pressure and risk sliding into poverty – and it is not only single-parent families and young people with poor education or no education at all who are at risk. Increasingly, it also applies to people with better qualifications, who have lost their jobs and (for various reasons, such as age) find it difficult to get another.

It is especially true for young people who find themselves in the vicious circle of (unpaid) internships, without any real prospect of any (permanent, properly paid) job that will enable them to support themselves and start a family. For this reason in particular, so-called “middle class” people are afraid above all that their prosperity is only temporary and they could lose it at any moment.

The gulf between rich and poor also runs between Member States. At the risk of sounding provocative, someone who may justifiably be considered “poor” in Germany or Austria is not truly “poor” when compared with those living in poverty in Romania or Bulgaria.

Since its inception, the European Union has used a wide range of instruments such as cohesion funds and structural funds to try and bridge this gulf, to bring the poorer countries up to the living standards of the richer ones. It has enjoyed some sweeping successes, even though the truth is emerging that the impact of these instruments is getting smaller and smaller.

For many people, the benefits are still trickling through too slowly or insufficiently. In the central and eastern European Member States above all, people perceive themselves as “poor” in comparison with their neighbours to the west, and expect to achieve the same standards of living as quickly as possible. This feeling of not getting their fair share is also one of the causes of their reluctance to accept refugees from outside Europe.

As an antidote to institutional tunnel vision, it helps to look into the eyes of those who should actually be empowered to act for themselves – in our case, the poor themselves. We speak far too often ABOUT the poor and seek solutions FOR THEM – all too rarely do we speak WITH them and seek solutions TOGETHER WITH THEM. It could be that our actions are part of the problem, not of the solution: our way of life, our lack of consideration, our egotism could be among the causes of their poverty. This sometimes hinders honest dialogue, because we risk being called into question, but Christians should not shy away from the issue.

For this reason, the COMECE Bishops have not limited themselves to participation in discussions and meetings with politicians and the representatives of NGOs. They have in fact been visiting organisations that are devoted to working with the poor and the excluded. These meetings in small groups, eating together and holding conversations, have become the touchstone for the sustainability of the solutions that were discussed during the study days. They have opened our eyes.

**Michael Kuhn**  
COMECE

*Translated from the original text in German*

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## Content

US elections and the catholic vote	2
Possibilities for combating poverty in Europe	3
Growth and the euro after Brexit	4
Brexit and its impacts on environmental policy	5
An electoral year without an election in the Democratic Republic of Congo	6

### europainfos

Monthly newsletter, 11 issues per year  
Published in English, French, German  
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## US elections and the catholic vote

### External Policy

United States

**After ignoring Catholic voters for almost the entire election cycle, the media has finally woken up and recognized that they are important, just a few weeks ahead of the US elections on November 8, 2016.**

Up until now, the only religious group anyone reported on was evangelicals. How much support they were or were not giving Donald Trump was minutely analyzed, but no one cared how Catholics were voting in primaries.

The media forgot that steadfast support of Republican Catholics was essential to the nominations of Mitt Romney and John McCain. But this year, we don't really know how Catholic Republicans voted in primaries because no one asked them. The exit polls only asked about evangelicals.

It is as if reporters listened to the first half of E.J. Dionne's comment - „There is no Catholic vote“ - without hearing the second half - „and it is important.“ What he meant was that Catholics do not vote as a block, but they can determine the outcome of an election. After all, they make up one quarter of the electorate.

Catholics have voted for the winner in almost every presidential election since 1932. If Democrats lose Catholics, they cannot win the election.

What caught the media's attention was a series of recent polls that actually asked Catholic voters what they thought and for whom were they going to vote.

A new poll from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) showed Clinton leading Trump by 23 points among Catholics (55 percent to 32 percent). Likewise, a Washington Post-ABC News poll gave Clinton a 27 point lead among Catholics (61 percent to 34 percent).

As Donald would say, this is a „huuuge“ lead, especially when one looks at how President Obama did with Catholics four years ago.

Clinton is doing four points better than Obama with all voters, but she is doing 25 points better with Catholic voters in the

Post-ABC poll. This is the biggest shift for any demographic group in the poll.

The only group that matches this shift is college-educated white women, whose alienation from Trump has been well covered in the media. My guess is that if pollsters looked at Catholic college-educated white women, the shift would be even greater.

### The Catholic vote is not monolithic

Hispanic Catholics have been pushed into the arms of the Democratic Party by anti-immigrant rhetoric from Republican politicians, especially Trump. It is no surprise that Clinton is supported by 76 percent of non-white Catholics (who are mostly Hispanic) in the PRRI poll, with Trump getting only 13 percent.

But this does not fully explain why Trump is doing so much worse than Romney among Catholics. Hispanic Catholics were solidly in the Republican camp four years ago.

The big difference is among white Catholics, according to the Post-ABC poll, who gave Romney a 19 point lead over Obama but now give Clinton a six point lead. Support for Clinton has been growing among white Catholics who favored Trump over Clinton by 56 to 29 percent back in March but now support her by 51 to 45 percent in the Post-ABC poll.

### What is responsible for this change?

Most commentators say it is less about liking Hillary as worrying about the Donald. The more they heard him, the more Catholics were turned off. His anti-immigrant rhetoric not only alienated Hispanic Catholics, it also hurt him with white Catholics who realized that most of these immigrants are their Catholic brothers and sisters.

In addition, they remember the stories they heard about the discrimination faced by their parents, grandparents, or great grandparents when they first came to this country.

Finally, like the rest of the country, as the election draws near, Catholics conclude that although Trump is fun to watch, he is not presidential.

If Clinton wins by a landslide, it will be because she won back white Catholics to the Democratic side. These voters will also be important in the swing districts and swing states that will determine the makeup of the

House of Representatives and the Senate.

After ignoring the Catholic vote for more than a year, it is nice to see the media once again take it seriously.

*Fr. Thomas J. Reese sj*

*In 2014, Father Reese was appointed by President Obama to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. He was elected to a one-year term as chair of the commission in June 2016.*

*This article was initially published in the National Catholic Reporter.*

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us-election

# Possibilities for combating poverty in Europe

## Social affairs

European Union

**When developing effective policies to fight poverty you need to open up the debate and long-term dialogue to include people who are living in poverty and exclusion, says Bert Luyts, representative of ATD Fourth World to the European Union.**

The EU has undertaken to reduce the number of people living in poverty by 20 million by 2020. What is the state of play today?

Official statistics on the evolution of poverty in Europe are far from reassuring. For many years rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion kept on rising, but in 2015 the EU was able to record a fall back to 2008 levels. In total Europe holds 119 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and that still represents nearly a quarter of its population. The timid reversal of the trend, far from lulling us, should be spurring us to act with greater conviction against poverty. All the more so because poverty is becoming more and more entrenched and increasingly severe, especially where young people (under 25 years old) are concerned.

Naturally, you cannot base your understanding of the breadth and depth of poverty entirely on statistics. A great many people have no idea of what life is like for these people or of what they think.

**How can it happen that 25% of Europeans are at risk of poverty while European countries have the world's most advanced social security systems?**

Probably the answer to that lies in the fact that even the best system still relies upon the actions and interactions of human beings. The lack of trust between population groups, the mutual lack of understanding, prejudices too, represent obstacles that are underestimated. Social cohesion is not just a secondary objective, it is crucial. For example, when a person living in a caravan parked on a plot of land that lies on the border between two communes is unable to register his official place of residence in either of these communes, that problem cannot be entirely explained away by pointing to loopholes in the regulations. Another problem is discrimination, which is

usually indirect: the imposition of burdensome and dissuasive procedures which result in high rates of non-access to welfare and allowances.

**Does having a job keep you out of poverty?**

Yes and no, because it's not just the wage level that counts: if a job is of good quality, it also provides inclusion in a system of social protection and an enrichment of the worker's social network. However, there are also jobs that impoverish: jobs in the black market sector or of lower status, precariously part-time, call centres, working solitary tasks for very non-standard working hours, or working in an atmosphere of competition and suspicion.

The desire to work, to be useful to others, is an instinct far stronger than people realise. A lot of people who are jobless for a long time have lost any hope of getting back into work, and extremely rare are the people who actually enjoy being on the dole.

The European Union is going to be playing a major role in the transition towards a 'zero carbon' economy, that of creating new business activities and new jobs. Couldn't we make the effort to plan such new businesses and jobs to be fully accessible to people who have been in long-term unemployment and above all for young people who find themselves in the greatest insecurity?

**What can the EU do for the most vulnerable people?**

Not a lot, as far as social policy is concerned: member countries insisted on retaining total control in this domain. For measures affecting employment, the EU has somewhat greater powers. However, we can see that Recommendations, which are not binding, may be followed in a majority of countries. Take, for example, the "Youth Guarantee" Recommendation. Obviously, the presence of financial support from the European Structural Funds has also provided an incentive for Member State initiatives.

In 2014, ATD Fourth World organised a European People's University in partnership with the European Parliament's Intergroup on 'Extreme poverty and human rights'. This project, linking people living in poverty, people working with NGOs and people connected with the European institutions, has produced 14 proposals for Europe in a dozen different domains.

There you will see that the expectations are high, and go even further than the possibilities for manoeuvre contained in the current Treaties. Yet what we have found out in practice is that, very often, if you really take into account the ways that people affected by poverty live and think, you cannot stop that from affecting the existing framework. On 20 December, in the European Economic and Social Committee we are going to deepen our proposals on guaranteeing a decent minimum wage and the right to legal residence in a territory.

*Interviewed by Johanna Touzel  
COMECE*

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participation of the poor



# Growth and the euro after Brexit

## Economy & Finance

European Union

**A report drawn up by a group of international experts under the aegis of the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Jacques Delors Institute, is promoting a set of recommendations, which Enrico Letta, President of the Jacques Delors Institute and former Italian Prime Minister, sets out below.**

Mr Letta, is the euro area sufficiently solid at the present moment to survive another crisis?

No, it is not. Too few of the structural weaknesses that triggered the previous crisis in the euro area have been addressed. In the end it was the European Central Bank (ECB) that brought back stability to the euro area. It won enough time to allow national governments in the euro area to strengthen Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), to invest in and reform their domestic economies, but this time has not been used effectively.

In most of the Member States today there is very little room for budgetary manoeuvre in order to survive a potential future crisis. We also lack the necessary tools to stabilise the euro area by using budgetary policy at EU level. Some of the promising new projects in the pipeline, such as the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union, are still at their earliest stages, while exposure to risk is still too high in Europe's banking sector. Very little political goodwill is left for embarking on new risk sharing schemes or to put in place new reforms in exchange for a programme of support. By turning a blind eye to these weaknesses of the euro and just hoping that a rapid solution will be found to the next crisis – you adopt an attitude that is both dangerous and costly.

What should be done right now to tackle these weaknesses?

In the report that we recently published, *Repair and Prepare: Growth and the Euro after Brexit* we recommend that action should be taken on two fronts.

Firstly, we have to put in place a 'first aid kit' to shore up the euro against any possible new crisis in the short and medium term. This first aid kit would include a reinforcement of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), a

further strengthening of the Banking Union and better economic policy coordination under improved democratic control.

Secondly, we need to have a global agreement combining structural reforms at national level with a global public-private investment initiative (including especially a reinforcement of the Juncker Plan and the introduction of a European budget capacity).

This package of measures, aiming to encourage convergence and growth, should start off in parallel with the first aid kit but should be continued on a much longer-term horizon (about 10 years).

In the long term, should there be any reforms in the institutions?

The measures that we are recommending for immediate implementation are capable of stabilising Economic and Monetary Union in the short and medium term. However, even with these changes, EMU would still retain its intergovernmental character which is essentially rule-based. Such a structure cannot offer either the necessary flexibility needed to respond to emerging economic challenges, nor the strict democratic control that is indispensable for guaranteeing public approval.

That is why we believe that EMU will have to rely in the long term upon a coherent and legitimate framework of supra-national economic governance. That implies the transformation of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) into a fully-fledged European Monetary Fund and a significant strengthening of parliamentary control to enhance European legitimacy.

That would mean more occasions for sharing sovereignty. How could citizens and their governments be persuaded to accept them?

It is true that the third pillar implies a major sharing of sovereignty, but this would be accompanied by a substantial reinforcement of democratic control of the decisions taken at European level. We are recommending, for example, the creation of the post of European Finance Minister, who would replace the Troika in the negotiations for and supervision of aid programmes. This minister would report to a committee made up of representatives of the

European Parliament and national parliaments (which could always submit a veto to any of its decisions by qualified majority vote).

We also think that with the measures of the second pillar (the global agreement combining reform and investment), the euro area will steadily get back to growth and will be back on track for convergence, and this will make risk sharing among countries much easier. Finally, all this will need a major reform of the EU Treaties, but amending the legal framework to accommodate Brexit may in any case lead to a reform of the Treaties.

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*Translated from the original text in French*

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Enrico\_Letta



# Brexit and its impacts on environmental policy

Climate change  
European Union

**Brexit's impact on environmental policy will be felt not just in the UK but also in the European Union. While the UK risks sliding towards a lowering of its standards, the EU will be losing a Member State that has been extremely active in this field.**

While Brexit has put the strongest spotlight on its political and economic consequences, we would like to shine a light on its potential effects on environmental policy in both the UK and the European Union. After full implementation of Brexit, the set of EU environmental standards – currently far more rigorous – will no longer be applicable in the UK. When planning for the future, with the new relationships between the EU and the UK, the European Commission made it clear that no trade agreement with the EU would ever lower the European level of protection of consumers, food safety, or environmental protection.

The Brexit campaign was full of extremely controversial rhetoric, much of which had very little connection with reality. A rapidly convened new group called Clexit (contraction of the words Climate and Exit) has been formed, which openly called for the UK to come out of the historic Paris Climate Agreement signed last December. “Clexit is our answer to the push for global control through climate hysteria,,” said the group.

## Voices from civil society

In an open letter to the then Secretary of State for Environment, Liz Truss the Green Alliance, one of the most renowned environmental thinktanks in UK, expressed concerns about the possibility of leaving the EU and the anticipated damage to the UK's environment. The letter's authors also listed the benefits of being part of a European system with high standards of environmental protection. Concretely, it stated that “being part of the Union has enabled us to coordinate action and agree policies that have improved our quality of life, including the air we breathe, the seas we fish in, and have protected wildlife which crosses national boundaries. Higher European manufacturing standards for cars, lights and household appliances have lowered consumer energy costs, and stimulated business innovation.”

Three months before the June 2016 Referendum, the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) produced an extensive report exploring the potential environmental implications for the UK if it chose to leave the Union. The consequences of departure would mean facing a combination of greater risks to its own, current, domestic decarbonisation ambitions. It would mean a reduction in its influence on international climate negotiations and the door would be closed on its exerting the same level of influence on decision-making at European level (and thus on the constraints facing UK industry's competitors in other EU Member States). “It is likely that a UK departure from the EU would leave the British environment in a more vulnerable and uncertain position than if the country were to remain as a member of the EU,” says the report.

GReen10 represents the ten most prominent NGOs working on environmental issues in Brussels. In its letter addressed to the EU institutions after the Brexit vote, this group of NGOs remind them of the EU's responsibility – and its powers – to take the lead in dealing with environmental issues; even though it is losing an important member, this should not reduce its engagement: “It is crucial for the EU to show it is united, not paralysed, and remains willing and able to act for the benefit of its citizens and their natural environment. The EU remains uniquely placed to lead in tackling the global challenges of climate change.”

In August 2016 the UK House of Commons published a detailed briefing paper warning about the lowering of environmental standards after Brexit as there will be fewer incentives for the UK Government to comply with environmental standards without the EU's enforcement mechanisms. One more voice from the ‘Remain’ campaign, Barry Gardiner MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, highlighted the importance of the EU in coordinating the management of transboundary environmental issues: “The fact is that fish and birds and insects do not carry passports; pollution is oblivious to the strictures of national airspace or inshore waters. If we wish to manage all of these, whether as pests, problems or resources, then it is better to do so in concert with our regional neighbours.”

Probably nothing provides better evidence of our current global interconnectedness than the environment. Brexit will show that isolation is a totally unrealistic option as a life choice. While the UK may not want to live inside the EU, it had better move fast to find some sustainable strategies for relating to its continental neighbours. In turn, the European Union has to demonstrate, once more, that it has the capacity to accommodate diversity, although in this case, this action would not represent a desirable objective, but much more a mutual need.

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# An electoral year without an election in the Democratic Republic of Congo

External Policy  
European Union

**Sliding into insecurity is a scenario being taken very seriously by the international community. What latitude does the European Union have now?**

At their Council meeting of 17 October last, the European Union's Foreign Affairs ministers declared their position in no uncertain terms on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The EU issued an explicit condemnation of the violence perpetrated on 19 and 20 September in Kinshasa, stressing that the authorities were responsible for organising elections, insisting that these elections had to be organised as soon as possible in 2017, and demanding that the Constitution be respected, particularly the provisions limiting the number of times one person can be elected as president. The EU also called for an inclusive and transparent political dialogue, involving in particular CENCO (the National Bishops' Conference of the Congo) and supported by a wide popular consensus, and demanded that human rights and the rule of law should also be respected. Finally, the EU invoked the possibility of sanctions against the regime and reaffirmed its support, especially financial, for a transparent electoral process.

## Current status of the negotiations

On that same day, an agreement was reached in the mediation process conducted under the aegis of the African Union in the form of a 'national dialogue'. The objective was to find a solution to the latent crisis which has been persisting since the re-election – marred by blatant irregularities – of Joseph Kabila in 2011, and to progress rapidly to free and peaceable elections. By this agreement, the elections for the president, the national government and provincial governments have been postponed until April 2018. In the meantime, the plan is to keep Joseph Kabila in office and to give the post of Prime Minister to a leader of the opposition, probably Vital Kamerhe.

This agreement was immediately denounced by the opposition, which called for a general strike, labelled 'Villes mortes' (dead cities), as their demonstration of protest, and this threw into doubt any hopes of a rapid resolution of the political crisis that is currently causing upheaval in the DRC.

President Joseph Kabila, who has been in power in the DRC since 2001, is coming to the end of his second term of office – which on paper is his last – on 20 December of this year. The Constitution prevents him from standing again for office and he has not managed to pass an amendment to change it. However, he is not showing any signs that allow people to think that he will effectively step down from his functions at the right time; indeed, today it is logistically impossible to hold new presidential elections within the due time limits. Moreover, last May, upon being referred to by the parties in power, the Constitutional Court issued a decree authorising him to stay in post in case the elections were delayed.

'Slippery' is an apt word to describe the political strategy of having presidential elections whose planning is deliberately put off sine die – because the existence of such an electoral crisis is completely artificial.

The 'Rassemblement' (a loose coalition of political and social parties in opposition under the leadership of Etienne Tshisekedi) has insisted on a number of preconditions before participating in the national talks, including the liberation of political prisoners and the halt in the legal harassment of Moïse Katumbi, the presidential candidate now living in exile in Europe.

## The Catholic Church's position

The Catholic Church, to which 40% of the Congolese belong, has itself halted its participation in the talks as a result of the violence that broke out as side events of the demonstration organised to call upon Joseph Kabila to step down.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Congo (CENCO) is calling for an independent enquiry into the murderous repression which left several dozen people dead, and for the political agreement approving the national dialogue to state explicitly that the current president would not seek a third term of office. To date, these conditions have not been complied with.

Clearly the traditional institutional actors have lost all credibility, since both the ruling and the opposition parties come from the same school of politicians. Civil society has also lost its capacity for organising action and the population is looking for new forms

of coalition, this time involving the younger generation that feels excluded from political life, and for escape from the catastrophic socio-economic conditions.

Sliding into insecurity is a scenario that is being taken very seriously by the international community: the United Nations Council for Human Rights has put the country under surveillance following the recent violence and the increasing restrictions of fundamental freedoms. The International Criminal Court has announced that it is closely watching the course of events. The US Treasury has placed on its black list two top military generals who are close to the President.

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*Translated from the original text in French*

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Elections in Congo