



European Network on Religion & Belief

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

**Perspective on wellbeing and growth
Seminar 2**

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European Network on Religion & Belief

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Seminar was organised to prepare a contribution to the European Equalities Summit 2012 in Lefkosia, Cyprus, organised by the European Commission's DG Justice on November 22nd 2012. Copies of the Background Paper and Key Messages summary were available at the Summit.

ENORB was particularly glad to have been invited to make a contribution relating to work on the sixth strand of EU Equalities legislation (on Religion and Belief). Although development work on a European Anti-Discrimination Network relating the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief had been going since 2009, and a formal Exploratory Group had been meeting since 2010, ENORB was only legally constituted in 2011 and registered as an ASBL (Charitable Trust) under Belgian Law in 2012.

This is the second in a series of ENORB seminars, and will be followed by 2-3 further seminars in 2013. ENORB wishes to acknowledge gifts of time, office space, food, administrative and management support from ENAR, AFAN, HFE, RfP-Europe, FIOE, CEJI, G3i, TCF and LBFN, without which this seminar and report could not have been prepared and delivered.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This ENORB contribution to discussions at the European Equalities Summit 2012 began from a conviction that European organisations should, periodically, and especially at times of crisis, look again at the founding principles of the European Union as set out in the EU Treaties and related documents (eg Charter of Fundamental Rights), in relation to

Equalities. For ENORB, our main concern in the field of Religion and Belief. These principles can be summarised as:

- (i) A peaceful and harmonious Europe based on respect for diversity and dignity of people from all backgrounds – social, cultural, ethnic, religion/belief – under a uniting vision of justice and human rights for all. Equal opportunities and equal treatment – especially important in a time of an economic crisis – enable all community groups and regions to be both fully valued and ready to commit wholeheartedly to European well-being and recovery.
- (ii) A Europe based on economic and social solidarity. Morally and economically, Europe cannot afford inequality: all citizens are needed to contribute to creating, as well as to sharing, vital economic resources across the whole European population, so that all can benefit from at least the basic necessities of life.
- (iii) A Europe which values economic well-being rather than continuous growth, which is no longer sustainable in a crowded continent. Austerity, at least in the form of cuts which fall on the poor rather than the wealthy is also unsustainable, and has lead to violence and disorder. European values, as exemplified in the Europe 2020 strategy, offer a different approach, favouring deprived and excluded minorities. ENORB supports this approach, with a focus on human flourishing – defining growth only in a holistic sense – on the basis of principles of ethics and justice, as set out in the summary recommendations below:

Fairness and Justice in Business and Finance

- Healthy banking and financial practices which support a sustainable European economy
- Fair profit levels; excessive or 'windfall' profits to be re-distributed to combat poverty
- Investment priorities for useful production, not excessive profits or immoral industries
- Fair salary levels for all staff which reflect human, not market values

Efficiency and Justice on Taxation

- Taxation which limits excess income, favours the poor, and provides a living wage for all
- Efficient taxation policies on businesses to end tax avoidance, havens and false addresses
- Effective taxation collection methods to aid full contributions by businesses and individuals
- More direct taxation, less indirect taxation (eg VAT – which disfavors the poor)

Regulation for an Ethical Economy

- Effective European/international regulation of banking practices and finance industries
- A tax on all financial transactions to fund the social costs of market greed and speculation
- Effective regulation of multi-national companies – fair practices and local contributions
- Effective regulation of all businesses to ensure payment of social costs of business practice
- Regulatory bodies with the means to monitor and enforce new and fair regulations

Sustainable Economic Policies; Well-being not Austerity

- Focus on well-being rather than growth: countering economic/social costs of austerity with growth and investment only in ecologically beneficial industries, renewable energies/recycling
- Strict controls on damaging industries
- Reform of agricultural policies and subsidies to encourage local and sustainable production
- Fair International Trading policies – living wages, local economic benefits and damage repair

3. BACKGROUND PAPER

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT FOR THE EUROPEAN EQUALITIES SUMMIT 2012

Alan Murray
President, ENORB

3.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This ENORB contribution to discussions at the European Equalities Summit 2012 began from a conviction that we need periodically, and especially at times of crisis, to look again at the founding principles of the European Union as set out in the EU Treaties and related documents (eg Charter of Fundamental Rights). These can be summarised as:

i) A peaceful and harmonious Europe based on respect for diversity and dignity of people from all backgrounds - social, cultural, religion/belief - with a uniting vision of justice and human rights for all. Equal opportunities and equal treatment – in an economic crisis - enable all regions and groups to be fully valued and able to commit wholeheartedly to European well-being and recovery.

ii) A Europe based on economic and social solidarity. Morally *and* economically, Europe cannot afford inequality: all are needed to contribute to, as well as to share, vital economic resources across the whole European population, so that all benefit from at least the basic necessities of life.

iii) A Europe which values economic well-being rather than continuous growth, unsustainable in a crowded continent. And austerity in the form of cuts which fall on the poor rather than the comfortably off, leading to violence and disorder, is also unsustainable. The Europe 2020 strategy offers a different approach favouring deprived and excluded minorities. ENORB's focus is on well-being - redefining growth holistically - on principles of ethics and justice, as in the key areas below:

Fairness and Justice in Business and Finance

- Healthy banking and financial practices which support a sustainable European economy
- Fair profit levels; excessive or 'windfall' profits to be re-distributed to combat poverty
- Investment priorities for useful production, not excessive profits or immoral industries
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- Effective regulation of multi-national companies - fair practices and local contributions
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- Regulatory bodies with the means to monitor and enforce new and fair regulations.

Sustainable Economic Policies; Well-being not Austerity

- Focus on well-being rather than growth: countering economic/social costs of austerity with growth, innovation in ecologically beneficial industries, renewable energy/recycling, control of damaging industries
- Reform of agricultural policies and subsidies to encourage local and sustainable production
- Fair international Trading policies – living wages, local economic benefits and damage-repair

3.2 BACKGROUND

This paper was prepared for the ENORB Seminar on the Economic Crisis, November 13-14 in Brussels, where it was discussed, amended and approved. ENORB brings together inter-convictional, religious and non-religious organisations which share a firm belief in the European

Union as a means to the maintenance of peace and well-being across the European continent - which has been torn apart twice in the past 100 years by major wars. Currently, Europe is suffering serious tensions as a result of the Economic Crisis, creating divisions between North and South Europe, Eastern and West Europe, rich and poor, urban and rural, profit-creators and profit-takers.

ENORB draws on both the strong historical religious and philosophical traditions of Europe, whether Christian, Jewish and Muslim, or Humanist and atheist. It draws equally on the religious diversity of modern Europe: Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and other religions, including a revived paganism based on sharing responsibility for caring for the Earth. ENORB and its member organisations are committed to the fundamental values enshrined in the EU treaties, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the successive Equalities Directives which have supported the struggle against discrimination, and for equal treatment, on the grounds of gender, race, age, ability/disability, sexual orientation, and religion and belief across Europe.

3.3 RATIONALE

ENORB's first priorities are for the struggle to combat discrimination in any form and to promote mutual understanding between different religious and non-religious traditions. We support grass-roots action at local level wherever discrimination, hate-speech or crime are manifested. A European Network which brings together the full diversity of Religion and Belief across the EU, also has both a duty and a right to engage with the important European policy issues which affect all European populations. It can speak out, when necessary, not by attempting to represent all the diverse

traditions of its member organisations, but rather to promote the fundamental European and human values which they share, both as EU citizens and as representatives of civil society.

We have a *duty* to speak out: because of the foundational status of ethics for all our worldviews. Whether we trace the origins of our fundamental values in Socrates' eternal verities, Aristotle's cardinal virtues; in the moral teachings of Moses, Jesus or Mohammed, or of Gautama Buddha or Guru Nanak, is less important than the fact that the common values we cherish are shared by all our member organisations. We also have a *right* to speak out because our diverse traditions and shared concerns enable us to speak from positions which have never embraced the flawed assumptions of the monetarist and market driven policies which have under-pinned much economic discourse for the past 40-50 years. As members of religious and non-religious traditions which see relationships - of family, community, culture, belief - as being at the heart of human life, we cannot see, nor can we accept, that people are defined solely as consumers or as individual economic actors driven by competitive desires for material satisfaction.

We recognise the danger of appearing to 'ask for too much' by seeking too great a change in too short a time. But we think it necessary to think systemically, since the economic problems are systemic. They cannot be fixed by minor repairs or patching up. A paradigm shift is needed: from an over-riding concern with *growth*, to a focus on *wellbeing*, both for people, and for the natural world. As organisations and networks concerned with religion and belief, we have to take the risk of being criticised for presumption or naivety and speak confidently in the public and European arenas. We also ask

for a response, and would welcome comments or enquiries at enorb@enorb.uk.

3.4 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Interventions by organisations such as ENORB should necessarily focus on general principles – so-called ‘higher-level values’ - rather than on specific political proposals or economic prescriptions. But we make no apology for this. The majority of analyses of the crisis, whether in terms of current practices in banking and financial industries, or of structural imbalances in different member-state economies, have assumed that economics, the ‘laws of the markets’ etc are scientific or technical matters not subject to moral critique. The recipes proposed by economists for recovery - eg balancing the need for ‘financial discipline’ against the need to return to ‘steady growth’ – have also remained within similar market-economic frameworks.

Attempts to change dominant discourse of market economics to a discourse about people and ethics, about care and communities, have come not from the political classes, but from external sources, such as the Indignados in Spain or Occupy in UK and Northern Europe. From the Religion and Belief traditions across Europe – Catholic and Protestant, Jewish and Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist, and other religions – and from the leaders of humanist, non-religious and inter-convictional organisations which have been arguing for a financial system which is not based on excessive and unfair profits or on exploitative methods. And most of all from the people involved in local grassroots activities of churches, mosques etc, and non-religious charitable associations - organising soup kitchens, food banks, health and medical partnerships and coordinating actions

which make an attempt at redistribution of vital resources from the wealthy to the needy, and supporting people and families in poverty or need and those made homeless or unemployed by the crisis.

We join with others in welcoming such attempts to move political and economic discourse towards using concepts from the fields of ethics, of social justice - of the social gospel in the texts and teachings of the great religious and non-religious teachings and traditions which focus on communities of sharing and support. We argue that all politics should be grounded in a discourse based on essential human values – whether we prefer to trace them back to the precepts of Socrates or of Abraham. It is also a discourse which recognises the complexity of many important moral issues, not reducing human existence to purely acquisitive or material concerns, but responsive to culture and to changing social codes and capable both of making and listening to strong arguments. It is a discourse unafraid of controversy, but which seeks always both to learn from others and to identify common ground.

3.5 EUROPEAN VISION

The guiding vision of member-states in setting up the European Union and maintaining it over 60 years has been the establishment and preservation of peace in Europe after a century of conflict, including two European wars. Over the past 60 years major threats to European peace have been overcome in the debating, decision-making and negotiating structures of the European Union and associated alliances.

Economic policy was always an important component of the vision for the European Union, in the form of economic solidarity, sharing of expertise and planning production and distribution of resources,

most notably in the work of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) from 1951. This was a very different vision to *laissez-faire* attitudes of market-driven models which have dominated recent European economic policy-making. These have certainly been controversial, but more importantly, have demonstrably failed: over the crisis of 2007-8, and in the weak responses, focused only on financial issues, from EU and member-states. The measures taken have fallen hardest on the poor, have left the rich and corporate sectors largely untouched, and now arguably represent a threat to continued European peace and security, as seen in the riots, violence and destruction which have been a background to the work of this seminar.

An equally important component of the European vision has been that of social policy, again founded on solidarity: that *all* EU citizens should benefit from economic progress, and that the more prosperous regions of the EU should support those which are in more difficult economic and social conditions. In a time of economic crisis these principles, taken in conjunction with the principles of fairness and justice exemplified in the EU treaties and the Charter and directives on Fundamental Rights and Equalities, are particularly important. They imply both active policies and mechanisms for economic re-distribution and also specific measures to support those areas, people and groups who are deprived, excluded or experiencing unusual physical or economic circumstances. Equally important is the Europe 2020 strategy, which sets out aims, targets and policies which specifically tackle poverty levels and deprivation across Europe through interventionist social and economic actions which are vital to European wellbeing, and should not in any way be downplayed or limited at this time.

3.6 SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES

The issues identified and discussed below are those which have been discussions in ENORB and with member organisations in the period leading up to this seminar.

i) Austerity or Justice, Wellbeing or Growth

The first priority for a just European economic policy has to be an end to the recent (30+ years), and deviant form of economic discourse which seeks special exemptions from normal moral or political discussions of the consequences of policies, on the grounds of a claimed status as a science subject only to the 'iron laws of the markets'. Similarly we argue for an end to the taboo against discussing alternatives to unregulated and unsustainable growth as being the necessary aim of economic policies. Europe is suffering the consequences of this false consensus, which is a denial of the fundamental values enshrined in the European treaties.

These assumptions are also not shared by the majority of Europe's people, who have become more concerned over the last decade with stability and reducing insecurities than with constant selfish acquisition and consumption. There has also been a revival in people's concern with values and belief, and in their interest and involvement with religion, with charities and associations - non-religious, or partnerships between non-religious and religious - and with organisations concerned with ethical, environmental and national/ international issues of fairness and justice. This revival is often not exemplified in a return to regular worship or to attendance at meetings - humanists struggle as much as churches to maintain membership - it is demonstrated more in active citizenship

at local level, in charitable giving, and in issue-based activities, and above all in the quest for meaning and purpose by individuals and groups – often informal and irregular.

All of these concerns are demonstrated in popular reactions across Europe to the continuing economic crisis – widespread anger and disturbances against so-called austerity policies - in effect cuts in income, services available and essentials such as food - which fall hardest on the poor or excluded, and make no discernible impact on the salaries, lifestyles and assumptions of the rich. In addition, there is a widely-shared anger and incomprehension that those who created the crisis – the banks, financial industries and other non-productive sectors – have not been required to cut their own profits or to transfer wealth to support those who experiencing real hardship, and that most economic leaders have not moved significantly away from the policies which led up to the crisis.

Equally important has been the recognition that many European practices in the international arena – export/import trading methods, transfer of agricultural and manufacturing production to the Global South , unregulated outsourcing – are immoral in their effects. Uncontrolled and over-exploitation of local natural resources – human, agricultural and mineral – has consequences which are both discriminatory and often disastrous for the local people, environment and economy. An economic discourse anchored in shared European values can ensure that fair trading and production practices are introduced, monitored and regulated – including care and repair of local environments to support sustainability and human and natural flourishing.

Recommendations

- Review of economic policies at European and member-state levels based on shared European values of fairness, justice and solidarity, which replace quantitative growth with qualitative improvements and fairer distribution of resources
- Policies which regulate agricultural and industrial production to protect the environment, jobs and services, focusing on essentials which bring long-term benefits to people and environments
- Investment in less wasteful forms of energy, in renewable resources and sustainable consumption
- European regulation of trading standards and practices, including environmental impact, with effective means of enforcement covering multi-national as well as local enterprises
- European standards to develop fair trading practices outside Europe, and to provide just rewards for local labour and produce, including repair and improvement of local environment.

ii) Fundamental Rights and Equalities

One consequence of past economic crises has been a slowing down, or even reversal, of the implementation of equalities legislation in the private sector, and sometimes in parts of the public sector (eg on equal pay and conditions for men and women). In Europe at the present time, we are hearing public statements from some governments that implementation of the EU Directives on Fundamental Rights, in particular Equal Treatment Directives across all strands of equalities, is not affordable at a time of economic crisis.

According to the European values set out in the EU treaties and Charter on

Fundamental Rights such attitudes and policy arguments are clearly wrong. The European Union has a duty to counter them, to support the continued implementation of the directives, hopefully strengthened by the review being undertaken in 2013. Organisations in the non-governmental sector which are working to support implementation across Europe also need strong support and adequate funding to monitor and improve implementation on the ground (especially in the religion and belief strand, where no network has yet been supported from EU resources). Failure to implement the fundamental rights of all citizens is against the spirit and letter of EU treaties and should be resisted both by the EU and by member-state governments.

But it is equally wrong in economic terms, to seek to limit or roll back implementation of fundamental rights. Failing to allow people to realise their full potential in employment, whether on grounds of gender, race, religion/belief, ability/disability, age or sexuality *causes damage to the economy*. Any type of discrimination limits the pool of talent available to employers across Europe and should be resisted firmly.

Recommendations

- EU policies on Fundamental Rights and Equalities and the directives on Employment Rights should be strongly re-stated by the EU, and support should be given to governments working to support implementation.
- The Directives on Equal Treatment on grounds of race and gender should be fully implemented, and extended to cover the other four strands of equalities and anti-discrimination.
- The EU should ensure adequate resources are available to support the implementation of the directives, by funding robust equalities and anti-

discrimination organisations and networks covering all six strands of equalities, especially the sixth strand – Religion and Belief – where no European Network has yet been supported.

iii) Fair and Just Profits

Many of the problems of the current economic crisis derive from the excesses and in some cases immoralities of some banks, financial institutions and companies over the past twenty years:

- Excessive profits which have far exceeded just and fair levels (ie sufficient for the company's outgoings and investment needs) and have reached outrageous levels in some sectors.
- Banks have introduced practices and financial instruments which contribute little or nothing to society, and have no other purpose than to inflate company profits, creating 'virtual money' of no value to society.
- Culture of excess: false expectations and values have been encouraged by companies for many staff, especially young people recruited to the financial sector, by inflated salaries, tax avoidance, high expenditure on luxurious living, no thought for social responsibility, and exploitation of lower-paid workers.

Recommendations

- The EU can encourage stronger regulation and European Regulatory Bodies for Banking and other Financial Industries, requiring them to apply moral as well as financial criteria in assessing performance and evaluating success.
- EU leadership in shifting economic priorities from damaging and ethically unsound business (eg financial speculation, weapons trade) to productive and sustainable businesses

- EU should encourage significant taxation of financial transactions across Europe and the world.
- Mentoring schemes for young recruits (and older staff) to support self-evaluation according to principles of fairness and justice.

iv) Fair and Just Salaries

The past twenty years has seen a transfer of money from the poor to the rich across Europe: the gap between the rich and poor has increased significantly in most EU countries, and salary levels for some managers has grown exponentially, while wages for most employees has declined in relative terms since the early 90s. Since the economic crisis, salaries for young people and for women, especially those in part-time and low-paid jobs, have declined in absolute as well as relative terms. Meanwhile excessive salaries, bonuses and other rewards for senior managers, and some staff, especially those involved in money markets and investment finance, have reached such high levels as to encourage corrupt and immoral practices. This is economically damaging as well as morally wrong, because lower-paid workers spend a greater proportion of the income on the essential goods and services which keep the economy turning efficiently.

Recommendations

- The transfer of money from poor to rich should be reversed by interventionist policies which favour those on low incomes. Excessive profits and salaries for management etc should be reduced to fair levels, in order to allow salaries for lower-paid employees to be increased.
- Maximum levels for salaries in the financial, banking and business sector should be set at rates comparable to those available in other professions, including the public sector.

- Minimum wage and benefit levels should be revised and set at rates which enable people and families not just to survive but to live reasonably.

v) Fair Taxation - Direct and Indirect

The principles of fair and just taxation and of fair application of tax laws and regulations to all sections of society are fundamental principles of all democratic societies: in the European Union, member-states are responsible for taxation. Direct taxation (on incomes) is usually seen as a fairer form of taxation, since it applies to all citizens, and progressively to those on higher incomes. Indirect taxation, such as VAT on goods and services, affects particularly those on lower incomes. Corporate taxes are designed to ensure that businesses pay their fair share of the infrastructure and service costs which benefit them, including schooling, health and other services which provide them with a healthy and skilled workforce.

Over the past 20-30 years, there has been a huge increase in various tax-avoidance schemes, which enable companies, as well as some individuals, to avoid paying taxes in the country in which they live, work or operate their business or profession, by using tax havens and other non-domiciliary arrangements. In particular, some multi-national companies which have European and local headquarters, operational sites and employees in all or most member-states, are avoiding paying tax and/or VAT in the countries in which they operate.

Such practices are not only unfair, but morally wrong, since the company or individual is profiting from the benefits provided by the member-state, in terms of infrastructure, skilled workforce, facilities etc, without compensating the government which pays for the services

and people to enable the company to carry out its business, through paying reasonable levels of taxes.

Recommendations

- To the extent that it is within the competence of the European Union, tax-avoidance and other non-domiciliary arrangements should be made illegal, and multi-national companies operating in Europe should be required to pay their taxes on the same basis as local companies.
- Fair taxation policies, which ensure that the burden of taxation falls mainly and progressively on the rich, allowing exemptions for the lowest paid to allow them to contribute fully to society, should be encouraged at all appropriate forums for EU policy discussion and decision-making.

v) Ecological growth: care for the Earth

Earliest European economic policy was introduced in response to the need to regulate the unfettered exploitation of Europe's key natural resources through the ECSC and subsequent treaties from 1951. European religious traditions have addressed the complex challenges of human interdependence with nature in a number of documents, from Vatican II and Pope John Paul's encyclicals to Archbishop Rowan Williams' recent writings on climate change and the environment. Respect for life, expressed in different ways in the Book of Genesis, the Q'uran, and the writings of Claude Levi Strauss, is about much more than a narrow focus on beginning and end of life issues. It entails recognition of human relationships with the animal kingdom and plant life, and of human responsibility for the care and maintenance of the full diversity of the Earth's resources.

These concerns do not give religious leaders, or philosophers, the knowledge or expertise to make detailed environmental proposals, but do impose an obligation on them to set principles of care for the complex and fragile systems which support the health of humans and all species with whom we share our continent and world. In particular, issues like bio-diversity, nurturing the soil and preventing damage through over-use of toxic products, the preservation of forests and arable land, the just and responsible production and distribution of food and fuel are important topics in the context of a highly populated and prosperous Europe.

Equally important is to emphasise that responsibility for ethical practices should be shared – between governments, private enterprise and individuals. So that levels of consumption, concepts of 'necessary' levels of production and 'decent' living standards, and above all, the whole concept of growth – which if allowed to continue unchecked is unsustainable – need to be carefully monitored, and challenged if necessary on the basis of European values.

Recommendations

- The EU is the most appropriate and effective forum for discussion of key topics such as: which forms of growth support the health of Europe and its eco-systems; what are the right relationships between equality, justice and growth; what sort of regulation is needed of actual practice - in agricultural, forestry and other areas of environmental policy;
- Policies which regulate agricultural production and protect the environment also protect jobs and wellbeing, and are of long-term benefit to the economy;
- Investment in less wasteful forms of energy, and in renewable resources

in a time of recession can lay the foundations for sustainable consumption in the future.

4. EUROPE'S ECONOMIC CRISIS: WHAT FUTURE PATHS? WHAT TYPE OF GROWTH?

Fr Ignace Berten
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We are in the grip of an economic and financial crisis. This much is obvious. A crisis which, over the past few years, has attracted a fair amount of media coverage and public interest. Growing austerity measures, the strains being put on social welfare systems and unemployment benefits, business closedowns or restructuration plans, growing unemployment, increasing numbers of beggars on the streets... All these are signs of the present crisis. We may try to reassure ourselves by saying that this is just a difficult phase we must get through, and that with a bit sense and determination we will find our way back to economic growth. But does anyone really believe that?

The crisis is also a political one: following the general elections earlier this year, Belgium experienced great difficulties in forming a government, and the current coalition government remains fragile and lacks cohesion. The question is: can a unified Belgium survive? This situation is not unique: over the last few years, a number of States have experienced similar difficulties in setting up governments. Certain countries experiencing problems with the idea of national integrity: a referendum on Scottish independence seems likely in Scotland, and similar questions are being raised in Spain and Italy...

Is the current crisis not a crisis of civilization?

The symptoms of a civilizational crisis

It seems fairly obvious that western society is running out of steam and that its political and cultural ideals are not working. There are many signs that confirm this theory, and here are a few that I have noted, but the list is by no means exhaustive.

4.1 OUR RELATION TO NATURE

- The paradigm of technological and scientific supremacy is beginning to show signs of wear. Descartes said "by understanding the power and the properties of fire, water and air ...we can use them... in all ways that they pertain to, and thus become masters and possessors of nature" (Discourse of Method, part 6). New York and New Jersey are discovering that even the most economically, industrially and scientifically powerful nation is unable to withstand a tornado, or manage to protect itself satisfactorily, even if it has done managed better than its neighbour Haïti. Furthermore, it seems evident that technological and scientific reasoning cannot bring political stability to the world: the levels of violence that characterize modern wars and conflicts are obvious signs.
- The plundering of natural resources. There is an increasing use of rare resources in industry: non-renewable energy resources, notably crude oil, and metals, particularly those obtained from rare earths. The massive demands of water in industry and agriculture are threatening to affect its availability for domestic

purposes. Overdeveloped fishing practices are rapidly exhausting the world's marine resources. The balance between demography, development models and production and consumption trends is increasingly fragile.

- The growing use of heavy machinery, pesticides and fertilizers in agriculture, along with industrial waste, is exacerbating pollution of the soil and our water supplies, right down to groundwater level.
- Global climate: despite the doubts cast on the concept of global warming, mainly by powerful industrial lobbies, the general consensus is that the Earth's temperature is rising due to human intervention. This will have a profound effect on our climate if we don't change our habits in the near future. The frequency, not to mention the violence, of cyclones and hurricanes in recent years, the recurring episodes of both heavy rain and draughts around the world, are testimonies of this. Rising sea levels are threatening to engulf vast, unprotected coastal regions, largely poor and highly populated areas.

4.2 PLAYING SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

- A growing number of natural elements are being used in industry, many of them largely unknown and unused until recently (many derived from rare earths or metals), and we are constantly creating new molecules. The food industry may have increased hygiene standards that weren't previously used in traditional cooking and food preparation, but it has also introduced a whole variety of new additives, some of which are by no means harmless, and others that we

do not yet know the full effects of. The examples of products that have caused serious damage are not lacking.

- The development of biotechnologies and their impact on the human body has opened up a whole new horizon of possibilities, and their contribution to improving general health and diminishing pain and suffering is undeniable. Technical progress has made it possible to envisage the idea of an improved human being (is Lance Armstrong, as was suggested in a recent article, the man of tomorrow?). Are the possibilities offered by science and technology desirable, though? Are they responsible?
- The introduction of nanotechnology, already present in a number of fields, to the medical domain is a promising development, but again, it is difficult to foresee the possible consequences.
- The atom is an amazing source of energy, and its use in the production of electricity is largely non-polluting, but we know that it is not completely risk-free. It is impossible to calculate the catastrophic impacts of a major accident in this domain, and there is still no satisfactory solution for the treatment of nuclear waste.
- How far do we follow the principle of precaution? Although it is often impossible to evaluate all the negative effects of a new product or technology, if using the principle of precaution meant avoiding any risk, all forms of research, creativity and future progress would be paralysed and come to a standstill. How can we determine, with as much rigor and prudence as is necessary, a level of risk that is acceptable to all?

4.3 THE LOSS OF POINTS OF REFERENCE

None of us would like to live like our great-grandparents, with a total lack of comfort, a life-expectancy half that of ours, incurable illnesses and their lot of pain and suffering, no access to culture, etc. There is no sense in idealizing the past. There is a general consensus, however, that the following generation will have to deal with more difficulties than ours.

During the after-war years, from 1945 to 1975, or the "Golden Era" as it was referred to, most people believed that the way forward was characterized by a strong industrial and economic dynamic, and that this would bring about a better tomorrow. It is true that living conditions in a large majority of countries improved dramatically during this period (higher wages, the establishment of social welfare systems, increased family expenditure, greater access to higher education, more holiday and leisure time, etc.), and inequality was greatly diminished. A hard core of poverty persisted, however, in what was called the "Fourth World". People hoped that development would eventually eradicate this poverty and hunger in the near future. Though the prevailing outlook was positive, social tensions did exist, and there was a strong popular movement which called for the need to share out the benefits of wealth and productivity. The movement produced many tangible results, but slowly began to lose steam in the middle of the 1970s. Many have qualified the years that followed the Golden Era as the "Pitiful Era", and the past ten years have not improved matters, rather the contrary. We now live in a world of globalization, characterized by increasingly fierce international competition and the shadow of delocalization. What we are faced with

is far more complex than just a crisis of production and distribution.

The development of modern society, over the past few generations, based on a model of liberalization and reason, has had a certain number of deep social and cultural effects, not all of them negative, but which need to be addressed.

- Firstly, we have witnessed the development of human autonomy, both in terms of personal freedom and that of the individual. This is a highly positive development, but one which the Church finds difficult to accept. Rising individualism has brought about a secularization of the population and has brought into question its traditional figures of authority: religion, Christianity in Europe and the United States, and more specifically Catholicism in Belgium, France and southern Europe, is no longer perceived as the guiding structure of society, but rather as a constraint that modern society has now shunned.
- Freedom of thought and belief have flourished, brandished as fundamental human rights, and with them the diversity of convictions. One of the effects of this new multi-convictional society is the problem of establishing an ethical and cultural consensus in Europe. A task that is further complicated by the presence of a small but significant Muslim minority. Rather than gradually fading out of the public sphere, religion is now at the heart of the debate, and also the cause of new social tensions.
- This social dynamic has also brought about what Danièle Hervieu-Léger calls an exculturation of Christianity. Though society is now by and large mainly secular, and the idea of the separation between the Church and

the State has been firmly implanted for over a century in most countries, there is a general consensus that certain Christian paradigms prevail: we still use the Christian calendar, along with its principal public holidays, and Sunday continues to be used as the day of rest. These cultural traditions are more or less openly being brought into question. Suggestions of diminishing the number of Christian-based public holidays and introducing more Islamic or Jewish festival holidays, or running parallel calendars with separate religious holidays; treating Sundays as any other work day or allowing Saturdays to be used as a rest day for the Jewish community and Fridays for Muslims, etc., abound. The family is another traditional stronghold: it has taken a long time for divorce to be socially and legally accepted (it is still not the case in Malta), and the Catholic Church has done its utmost to prevent this. A number of countries, Holland and Belgium the first, are seeing a redefinition of the term marriage as a union between two people, be they heterosexual or homosexual. In France, the debate is focused on the idea of marriage for all. What are the long term effects of such changes? No-one can say.

The principle of human dignity, lauded by all as a basic right, is a central part of modern society, but how do we deal with issues where the limits of human dignity begin to merge: assisted procreation, the possible advent of surrogate motherhood, abortion, the rights of unborn children, euthanasia, methods of adoption, etc. It is obvious that there is no consensus on these matters, and yet political decisions need to be made about them, if only to establish a set of common ground rules.

- The surge of a liberal economy has promoted the ideology of competition.

Competition is an essential part of a healthy market economy, even one that is socially-orientated, but it is important that it does not overtake the market, encouraging competition between individuals (a me-versus-them mentality), regions and states. It is the idea of solidarity itself which is being put to question at all levels. Today, competition between states is actually stronger than cooperation, which is one of the founding principles of the European Union. The prevalence of competition in all areas of society has increased inequality, even in countries that seem to be maintaining a strong economy (the growing numbers of poor workers in Germany), or those that are enjoying rapid economic growth (China and India).

- This liberal ideology, with profit as its landmark, has also had profound cultural repercussions. It is true that profit is essential to a market economy, and primordial for investment, research and development, yet it is only one of the constituent factors of business enterprise, which has both a social function and responsibility. The financialisation of the economy has diverted profit away from its primary roles, in particular that of guaranteeing a decent wage for workers and sufficient investment for the future, towards the pockets of shareholders. This has generated an economy that is largely governed by the short term. The frequency of general elections and the rising influence of economic and financial institutions on the decision-makers have only served to consolidate this idea. From a societal point of view, this competitive and profit-orientated ideology has encouraged an "everything, immediately" type of culture, where there is no room for

time and anticipation. As a result, we can see a weakening of social ties, at both a relational and interpersonal level (marriage breakdowns, and all the suffering that incurs), but also in society as a whole, with rapidly weakening ties of solidarity, except for situations where an immediate profit is envisaged.

All these factors point to a crisis of civilization itself, with all the dangers that entails. We are faced with time-bombs: deepening inequalities and poverty in whole sectors of society are flagrant, and could in time lead to extreme forms of violence. The physical limits of our planet will put an end to our distribution and consumption systems, and thus to our way of lives, if we don't change them. The illusion of "ever more" will no longer hold.

Reasons for hope

Have we reached a dead end? Will the ideas of competition and conflict, the increasing inequalities present in our society and all the violence they engender, along with our inability to work together to embrace the importance of time, bring about the disintegration of both society and humanity as we know them, or reduce them to their minimal level of survival?

A jump start is possible, and to be hoped for, but time is running out. Could this economic crisis be the electroshock that is needed? Regionalism, nationalism and ongoing competition between states are not going to pull us out of this crisis. The only way forward is through an upsurge of European solidarity, so the more European we act, the better off Europe will be. There are a small number of voices that are calling for this change, but every day the numbers are growing.

We can see that the current systems of production and consumption are leading us to a dead end, it is now vital for us to explore new avenues, in both the political

and the cultural domain, in order to lay the foundations of a more sober economy and society, more in tune with nature, and more egalitarian.

There is also need for an ethical revolution: reasserting the importance of human relations, of solidarity, of the fundamentality of the passage of time. This last factor has been brought to the fore with the growing environmental and climatic problems around the world. We must work to replace the current paradigm of a competition-orientated "everything, immediately" world with one that is based on the importance of time, cooperation and intergenerational solidarity.

We need to alter:

- Our relation to others: only by working together on cooperation and solidarity will we be able to move forward.
- Our relation to nature: the earth is not a inexhaustible reserve of natural resources at our disposal, we must learn to live in harmony with it.
- Our relation to material things: instead of the current "more, more, more" fashion of overconsumption, we should aim for sobriety and moderation.
- Our relation to time: let us reintegrate the notion of time and the long term, rather than being blinkered by profit and the short term.
- Our relation to space: it is time for urbanization to move away from the current trend of wide-spread, over-populated, major cities.

The crux of this change needs to be the acceptance of our own limits and those of our planet, along with the renunciation of

our illusions of complete freedom and supremacy.

In this bid for change, we need to overcome the following obstacles:

- The idea that constant growth and the enrichment of the wealthy will automatically bring about a drop in poverty. This theory has never been proved, and many signs point to it actually being untrue.
- Our adherence to the current system and its benefits: our tendency to choose savings and pension plans offering the highest returns, with no thought as to where that money actually comes from, and the often disastrous consequences that this incurs (Dexia, etc.)
- The feeling of impotence: the problem is too vast, too complicated to tackle, and nothing can change it.
- The conviction that there is no viable alternative to the present economic and production system.

Is it too late? No one knows. Maybe. But one thing is for sure: if we don't act now, it **will** be too late.

So, if we are going to work for change, we must:

- Develop a collective awareness of the gravity of our current situation, and of the urgent need for change;
- Mobilise the greatest number of people: it is not sufficient to change the elite, we need leaders who are capable of raising awareness and guiding us, rather than presenting us with ready-made solutions.

5. WHAT KIND OF FUTURE FOR EUROPE?

Gerard Delfau

President, EGALE (Egalite, Laicite, Europe)

I will start with the question: what kind of economic crisis is sweeping our continent? Then move onto: what solutions are possible? And finish with the root problem: what sort of society do we want to build, and with which actors?

To reply to these questions, I would like to start by briefly commenting on a few recent events:

After the Wall Street crisis in America, London's stock exchange is now at the heart of a new scandal concerning manipulation of its financial markets. The biggest English banks, including Barclays, have been accused of deliberately supplying false information in order to push stock prices up. Hence four years after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, the event which propelled the world into a global economic crisis in 2008, we can see that financial markets continue to speculate with "by-products", or rather "toxic products", without any form of external control.

The entire global economy is affected, and economic growth in the West has plummeted. Governments are either impotent, or turn a blind eye. The financial markets are forcing more and more austerity measures on Greece, Spain and Italy (and to a lesser extent France), which pauperise and weaken whole sectors of society. Populist parties, sometimes with explicit Nazi references, as in Greece, are gaining in popularity. Discrimination, xenophobia and racism are on the rise. The selfishness of wealthy tax exiles and the stubborn refusal of the Greek Orthodox Church to help fund the

economic recovery are signs of an unprecedented crisis in moral values.

One can almost feel an atmosphere of the thirties floating over Europe again. The announcement of a minimum agreement (only 9 countries of the 27) to instil a very low tax on financial transactions within the EU is not enough to change this trend: our civilization is under threat from a new wave of uncontrolled capitalism, governed by the financial markets. This morning, Greece, already on the edge of ruin, was refused a new financial agreement which would have saved the country from bankruptcy because of a disagreement between the EU and the IMF on the possibility of rescheduling the country's debt, even if the chances of Greece ever being able to pay off its debt are slim. Here again it is Europe's leading banks and private creditors who have precipitated this nth European crisis, with the compliance of certain countries, including Chancellor Merkel's Germany. Europe is dancing on the edge of a volcano.

A second event gives us another insight into the situation: in November, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded not to a person, or even a country, but to a whole entity, the European Union. The jury's decision caused a great stir, but I feel that it was entirely justified and opportune. It even sparked a fierce debate in France, with those, I amongst them, who applauded this worldwide declaration that our continent, after suffering the effects of two bloody world wars in less than half a century, has recently enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace. Others, often of younger generations, contest this decision, arguing that Europe is undergoing the beginnings of a "civil war" which has severely affected the living standards of an increasing number of its citizens. Protest marches, demonstrations increasingly affected by violence, the

French riots of 2005, the more recent riots in England, where violent altercations flared up in certain city centres and suburbs, increasing conflicts between communities, every day the world news is punctuated by such examples.

Often religion plays a central role, and is used as a front or an outlet for these feelings of anger and frustration against the powers in place. I used to defend the European ideal "peace must go before food", which was often attacked in France. By this I meant that, though disappointed by Europe's ultra-liberal leanings, I still believed in the necessity of a European community in order to ward off the spectre of a 3rd world war.

Today, my fear is that if there is still not enough food on the tables of the poorer classes, if the number of victims of our consumer society continues to rise, then we will see more and more episodes of "civil war", and not just in the disadvantaged city suburbs populated by the poorer, often immigrant, sectors of society, already heavily discriminated against. The surprising recent hunger strike embarked on by Stéphane Gagnon, mayor of Sevrans, a small Parisian suburb, is a telling example. We may even witness, one day, an inter-Nation conflict, which would be a worldwide disaster.

How can we get ourselves out of this dramatic situation which could undermine Europe's position on the international scene?

We need to reaffirm the power of the State over the financial markets by imposing a strong tax on financial transactions; we need also to launch a vast campaign of infrastructure development, set up proper and well-funded policies in the fields of education, training and research, tackle the problem

of territorial inequalities, and fight against all forms of discrimination. The European Union must have as its goal full employment, with a proper growth policy that focuses on sustainable use of our natural resources and which profits every nation. The complete opposite, practically, of the European commission's current direction and the decisions taken at recent summit meetings.

Where will this change spring from?

From a raising of public awareness, transcending national boundaries and taking precedence over the interests of the wealthy, whether they are people or countries.

This is where a network of associations such as ENORB can make a fundamental contribution. Not only is it working at European level, but it is trans-national, across member-states. And it is based on the fundamental values of justice, equality, solidarity and against all forms of discrimination, including sexual discrimination, values which should be the basis of a new Europe. It is inter-convictional, a meeting-point of enlightened and independent believers from different churches and faiths, in the institutional sense, and includes the heirs of the Humanist tradition, draws from the Risale-I-Nur texts, and is strengthened by the laws on secularity and secularisation.

All influences, along with the "Christian roots" of our continent and more recent Muslim contributions, which have helped to shape the foundations of Europe. Jacques Delors, in his time, embodied this synthesis of ideas. Today, with no leader of his stature to take his place, let us be the ones to rebuild the links of our society, and help mould the structure of a new Europe. As François Mitterand said, "France is our country, but Europe is our future". I hope that one day the majority

of citizens in every country will proclaim this same ideal as their own.