



SHAPING THE EUROPE OF THE FUTURE

RESPECTING VALUES - RESOLVING CONFLICTS - TAKING RESPONSIBILITY



ZdK

Zentralkomitee
der deutschen Katholiken

A Declaration by the Presidium of the Central Committee of German Catholics

2025



ZdK

Zentralkomitee
der deutschen Katholiken

Contents

Introduction 4

1. Europe needs more democracy 6

2. Europe needs more social market economy 9

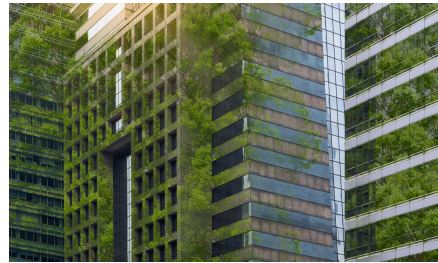
3. Europe needs more sustainability 12

4. Europe needs more unity in diversity 15

5. Europe needs more security 18

6. Europe needs more global responsibility 21

7. What the ZdK stands for:
Three perspectives for a Europe of the future 23





Introduction

Europe is at a turning point


The Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Treaty on European Union define what Europe is all about: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. These values mean a lot. It is our task in Europe to defend them. Without values, there is no Europe. We need to reassure ourselves: How much do we value the European Union, which bears the European idea?

Russia's attack on Ukraine is aimed at a democratic, constitutional and liberal Europe. The process of European unification, developed after World War II and the overcoming of the East-West divide, is suffering from increasing populism. In the recent European elections, anti-European forces gained momentum in many countries, including Germany.

These days, however, Europe stands for a new beginning. Resistance continues to grow against the selling-out of democracy. In Ukraine, the Western Balkans and the Caucasus, people are fighting for freedom and want to be part of a united Europe. These people show why it is important to continue building Europe as a continent of peace. They show where Europe's future lies.

Europe must redefine its place, in today's polycentric world

The continent carries the burden of its history. Colonialism, nationalism and racism have emanated from Europe. But the sources from which Europe draws its positive energies are numerous and strong.



Greek philosophy, Roman law, the Judeo-Christian concept of God and humanity, the universities of the Middle Ages, humanism, the Reformation and Catholic reform, the Enlightenment, the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights in 1789, the development of parliamentarianism, the labor and women's rights movements, social reforms, resistance to fascism and National Socialism, and the overcoming of the East-West blocs have all become milestones in European history. They stand against the power of the strongest and for the strength of the law, against arbitrariness and for enforceable rights, against religious fundamentalism and for the dialectic of faith and reason.

The fact that Europe has often betrayed these values does not diminish them but obliges us to rediscover and implement them. As a result of the unpredictable policies of the new US-administration and the focus on self-interest in BRICS plus countries, the EU has new opportunities as a reliable, attractive partner in the world.

Europe's greatest resource is its diversity of languages, cultures and historical experiences, combined with the spirit of discovery of young people in East and West, South and North. The Franco-German and German-Polish Youth Office, the Erasmus program for students in the EU and the Voluntary Service for Europe are representative of the many initiatives that make Europe tangible. This is how the future works!

Europe is more than the EU. But the EU serves to unite Europe, which creates peace. That is why pro-European politics must strengthen the European Union and the European Parliament.



The Catholic Church in Germany is challenged

After the horrors of two world wars, people like Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman and Alcide De Gasperi, Marga Klompé and Helene Weber stood at the cradle of European unification. Based on their faith, they built bridges across denominational, religious and national divides in a spirit of political responsibility. For decades, churches have been key players and promoters of encounter and reconciliation work; they organise international meetings and volunteer services. This work is not finished. Understanding and reconciliation across national borders is more important than ever in view of growing nationalist tendencies.

The ZdK places itself in this tradition. It brings together the international perspective of the global Catholic church with responsibility for the political community in Germany and Europe. The political commitment of the ZdK is based on faith: Faith in the liberating power of God and the conviction that people of good will can work together to shape a Europe of the future that fulfils its global political responsibility.

Solidarity and subsidiarity belong together. The EU must concentrate on its core tasks and find broad support for them. The Catholic Church has the task of supporting European cooperation between states in an ecumenical spirit and promoting social commitment at all levels.

It is important to protect democracy and the rule of law, to combine economy and transformation as well as ecological sustainability and social justice, to make migration and integration both human and legally secure, to guarantee the ability to defend, secure and promote peace and to assume global responsibility for development.

Europe has strengths that need to be utilised. If we want to maintain a united, solidary and democratic Europe, we need to dare more Europe, not less.



1 Europe needs more democracy

The EU is the only supranational democracy in the world. It is committed to the principle of the rule of law. This is one of its particular strengths - and one of the reasons for Europe's power. Many look to the European project with hope. Europe must defend democracy and the rule of law against its opponents from outside and from within. Christianity strengthens the conditions on which the Europe of liberal democracies thrives.

Challenges

Democracy and the rule of law are inseparable. Both are exposed to serious threats in Europe. The EU is needed to counter these threats. For its part, it must be democratically strengthened and secured by the rule of law.

Under the Basic Law, as in the EU, the principle of the rule of law is not understood in purely formal terms, but in material terms. It means more than fidelity to positive law and justice. It requires an independent and efficient judiciary, administration with integrity, separation of powers, effective protection of fundamental and human rights and transparent, pluralistic legislative processes. The rule of law can only be well realised in a liberal democracy; liberal democracy is dependent on strong protection by the rule of law.

For over a decade, however, serious rule of law crises have shaken some EU member states: the independence of the judiciary has been and is under attack; widespread corruption and insufficient will to tackle it are undermining people's trust in state institutions. This is shaking the foundations of the EU. Its law requires (needs and promotes) mutual trust between member states. But in some countries, the recognition of equal dignity and rights of all people is eroding; this calls into question Europe's common values and jeopardises democracy in the long term.

Democracy is facing growing threats from within and from the outside. In some member states, the freedom of the media is being restricted. Attacks on people and organisations that defend human rights are on the rise. Many people involved in democratic institutions, in politics and administration, in the police and in voluntary services are exposed to verbal and physical aggression. Political discourse threatens to become increasingly brutalised.

Democratic society is being destabilised by massive, state-controlled disinformation campaigns, espionage and cyberattacks, primarily of Russian and Chinese origin. Since the change of government in the USA, even democratic states have been threatened by attacks of unprecedented force on democracy and the rule of law: disregarding court decisions, lying and mocking political opponents, curtailing pluralism and academic freedom, as well as the undisguised intertwining of political power with their own economic interests.

Solutions

The major challenges can only be overcome through strong joint action at European level in defence of the rule of law and democracy. Energetic action by the EU institutions in response to rule of law crises, for example through infringement proceedings and the blocking of EU budget funds, is and will remain necessary. In the enlargement process, rule of law requirements must be enforced so that they are permanently anchored in future member states and are genuinely supported by society.

The EU has developed important legal instruments to protect democracy, including the "European Media Freedom Act" and the "Digital Services Act". These laws must be consistently implemented and enforced, including against the tech giants of the digital economy.



The "Shield for Democracy" announced by the EU Commission must include effective measures to combat disinformation, corruption and cyber-attacks and to strengthen democratic actors.

Even if the actions and procedures of the EU sometimes appear complex and cumbersome, the EU is the only supranational democracy in the world that many envy us for. The European project is a counter-model to the populist distorted image of democracy as mere majority rule by "the people". It guarantees the protection of minorities. It is based on immovable values. It has worked for almost 70 years in the search for successful compromises for joint action by formerly hostile people. As such, it can and must continue to guarantee freedom, security, stability and solidarity in the future.

Contributions of the Catholic Church

Christian ideas are among the roots of the EU and, together with others, characterise the European treaties to this day: the reconciliation of the European people, human dignity (Article 1 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) as the basis for all other fundamental rights, the basic principles of personality, subsidiarity, solidarity and sustainability, borrowed from Christian social teaching. This recollection invites all members of the Catholic Church to identify themselves anew with the European idea in ecumenical harmony and to fulfil their personal responsibility for it.

The Catholic Church has the potential to act as a major, Europe-wide player for the strengthening of Europe and to become a bridge-builder between North and South, East and West. Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union grants it rights that the Church must exercise more decisively than before, in order to promote European values.

Populist forces, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, are trying to accuse the EU of pursuing a one-sided agenda by invoking Christianity.



They call for a culture war and often receive support for this from local church representatives. What is needed, however, is the voice of a Catholic Church that unites rather than divides. Its task is to act as a moderator, to uphold the value of cultural diversity and to assert the principle of subsidiarity, which precisely defines the limited EU competences. At the same time, the Catholic Church must demand respect for human dignity and the rule of law (by which it itself is protected) everywhere.

Church associations and organisations are important local players in participatory democracy and must form broad alliances within the Christian ecumenical community, with other religions and with social movements throughout Europe. Conversely, the Catholic Church must clearly distance itself from all tendencies to build up the "Christian West" as a bastion against "foreigners" and to use religion as an amplifier of nationalism and as a warmonger. The Church follows Pope Leo XIV's message of peace and should use all its ecumenical contacts to ensure that the churches, including Orthodox, in present and future Member States promote European unification, the rule of law and human rights, including religious freedom.

The inestimable value of the Church lies in its pastoral and charitable work. It contributes to resilience against the current polarisation and uncertainties. It also strengthens democracy and the rule of law. People who are afraid of the future in the view of the threatening world situation or their own economic hardship, who have lost their trust in politics and institutions or who have become lonely in an individualistic society, can find new support through the encouraging message of the Gospel and through care in Christian love for one's neighbour, because they experience the power of community action and the blessing of God in it.



This strengthens their feeling of them being recognised and self-effective, on which all civic engagement and the affirmation of constitutional democracy ultimately depend on.

The decisive task of the Catholic Church is to make a clear distinction between the religious conviction of God's law, which serves the salvation of humanity, and human laws, which serve the common good, and thereby create the conditions for politics to be accountable to God and humanity when it uses power in the service of justice. In Europe, this distinction has been developed, betrayed and fought for again and again. In Europe, it must prove itself again.

2 Europe needs more social market economy

The EU is the only association of states committed to the social market economy. It therefore has a great opportunity to promote qualitative prosperity and gain international trust as a fair and reliable trading partner.

Christian social ethics create the normative foundations that provide orientation for politics. The fact that it is not people who are there for the economy, but the economy for people, is the construction point for an understanding of the common good, which is the guiding principle for the economy in the transformation process.

Challenges

Europe's international competitiveness is coming under increasing pressure. Global competition is growing, especially from the USA and China. Digitalisation raises new social issues that require new answers. Europe is currently confronted with an aggressive and unpredictable US tariff policy. Technical innovations are taking place more frequently in the USA, China, India and other Asian countries than in Europe. With the BRICS plus states (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and other countries), an alliance is forming that is setting itself apart from Europe as it pursues its own economic and power-political interests.

Self-made problems are exacerbating the situation. The current EU budget is too consumption-orientated and not innovative enough. In trade policy, there are still major gaps in agreements with other countries or economic areas. Dependence on authoritarian states, e.g. for critical raw materials, is high and contributes to economic as well as social and ecological uncertainty. In the financial sector, the banking and capital markets union has still not been finalised. Europe has nothing to gain economically and financially from selfishness, but it has much to gain from personal responsibility.

In economic and financial policy, there is a lack of realisation that tax dumping is not a sustainable plan for the future. Pan-European market regulation would be harmful, but a market policy that promotes competition not only helps the individual member states, but also the EU as a whole in the international competition.

Solutions

The social market economy is Europe's trademark in international competition. What is socially harmful and ecologically wrong cannot be economically right. Europe stands for the protection of the individual, human dignity, solidarity, the common good and sustainability. No system can guarantee intergenerational justice better than the social market economy.

Mario Draghi presented a comprehensive report on increasing Europe's competitiveness in September 2024.

It calls for a pan-European strategy for which substantial funds amounting to 4-5% of GDP are to be made available from public and private sources. The aim is to promote qualitative growth and technological innovation. The EU Commission has endorsed the report. The entire EU and the member states would be well advised to address the recommendations set out in the report.

Europe should act prudently in its response to the US tariff policy, because an escalating trade conflict serves neither side. The tariff policy has already triggered considerable turbulence on the international stock markets, from which only speculators have profited. Fears of inflation and recession are on the rise. However, the economy benefits from a political and social environment that is reliable.



The EU budget needs a far-reaching reform. Subsidies must be reduced in a socially responsible manner, and future-orientated areas such as research, development and innovation must be given a larger share. Openness to technology must be strengthened and science-friendliness promoted. Europe has the opportunity and the duty to make democratically promoted progress competitive with autocratic systems, while keeping this progress sustainable.

The world needs a new balance between international interdependence, which thrives on mutual trust, and economic resilience, which guarantees freedom. Europe's independence, for example in energy or food production, must be secured as well as possible. What is needed are not small-scale discussions, but political and economic solutions to the tensions between free trade and the social market economy.

The EU should conclude trade agreements with geopolitical allies that combine mutual benefit with global responsibilities. It cannot be ruled out that there will be negative influences on individual economic sectors and occupational groups. But individual European sectors must not exert too much influence on the negotiations or even block agreements that serve the common good. Disadvantages must be avoided or offset by economic, ecological and social transformation.

The conclusion of further trade, raw materials and energy agreements can serve economic development worldwide. However, it requires great diplomatic skills to combine one's own interests with the values and principles that Europe stands for. Clear rules and protective mechanisms are needed to ensure that human rights are upheld, the environment is protected, and the legitimate interests of the Global South are respected.



The banking and capital markets union must be finalised for the EU. It should improve fair access to financial resources on the capital market, reduce the risk for all those who save and mitigate the negative impact of insolvencies on those affected.

National egoisms are strong, even in tax policy. But they do not lead to the future. Enrico Letta's Single Market Report from April 2024, which outlines a European single market strategy in a global context, provides a good basis.

Fairer taxation of large digital companies is needed. Decisive measures must be taken against tax evasion and money laundering. Market monopolies must be combated.

Contributions of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church brings its social doctrine to economic policy debates, which calls for a people-centred economy. The Church has both concrete socio-political demands, e.g. better family support, youth work programs and combating poverty, as well as a value-oriented model for the economy. This model places inviolable human dignity, social justice and responsibility for creation at the centre, so that the transformation of the economy can succeed in a human and sustainable way.

Christian social ethics justifies the right to property, but also its social obligation, which is enshrined in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany. The states of the EU must guarantee entrepreneurial freedom but also demand entrepreneurial responsibility. Business, social and intergenerational justice and environmental protection belong together. Globalisation establishes universal responsibility, which becomes concrete at the local level.



"Justice and Peace" has launched exemplary initiatives to link economic responsibility, social justice and ecological sustainability. Churches are in demand as institutions. Even more important is the political commitment of their members to broad social alliances.

The Catholic Church urges the economy to be orientated towards the common good. Fair taxation is needed; tax dodges must be stopped. Consequential costs must not be imposed on the community; the principle of "the polluter pays" applies. The costs of production, investment and labor, including the necessary insurance cover, as well as the environment, must be included in the national and business balance sheets.

The decisive task of the Catholic Church is to redefine the concept of the common good. Qualitative growth, ecological responsibility and social peace belong together. Human happiness does not depend on money. But money must be invested well in order to improve people's living conditions. Europe is the continent where business ethics have been developed. It must be related to the transformation processes of the present in a broad alliance and thus be renewed in turn.

3 Europe needs more sustainability

The EU has a pioneering role in combining climate and social policy. It must not lose it. It contributes to inner peace and makes the EU a credible partner for many countries in the Global South.

The Christian view of humanity inspires the commitment to a civilisation of humanity, in which the option for the poor is realised and creation is preserved.

Challenges

In times of economic crisis, the promise of prosperity that has made Europe strong has become questionable. There is a wide disparity in prosperity within the EU. The social systems perform differently, and their financing becomes a problem in many places when the economy weakens, tax revenues fall, and the burden of taxes and insurance contributions increases. The need to increase economic competitiveness must not become an obstacle to welfare state responses in the Member States and the EU as a whole. If inequality increases between and within states, between rural and urban areas, between rich and poor, European unity will be jeopardised.

Europe is an "ageing continent". The shortage of skilled labour that will result from the retirement of the baby boomers will have an enormous impact on growth, prosperity and social equality. Both professional and family carers are at risk of being overloaded. Younger people will find it difficult to be heard politically. Future generations will be burdened with the high debts of the member states and the rapidly rising costs of social systems. The burdens of climate change and environmental destruction will be a decisive blow. Those who shape policy today must endeavour to leave an intact environment and a stable society to future generations.

Essential parts of the "Green Deal" have been implemented in climate policy, and the economy has invested a lot. However, the willingness not only of a number of member states, but also of many citizens, to organise and finance more climate protection measures has decreased significantly. This is where politics and society, business and science, including the churches, are called upon. The idea that money is either only available for social issues or only for the environment fails to recognise the inner connections. Preserving ecosystems is cheaper in the long term than the laborious repair of environmental damage.

Solutions

At the moment, social policy is primarily the responsibility of the member states. Cities and municipalities that strengthen sustainability and inclusion need good framework conditions. In its own interest, the EU must promote qualitative prosperity and a democratic legal culture in order to support social work at grassroots level.

Large and small institutions that set themselves the task of combining ecological sustainability and social justice will also benefit directly and indirectly.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) must be implemented with determination and a sense of proportion to ensure equal opportunities within and between nations. A sufficient minimum wage that covers the basic needs of housing, health and food is necessary in every country and must be economically viable in every country; it should be harmonised across Europe in order to consolidate equal opportunities. The EU has laid the foundations that need to be expanded. A race to the bottom at the expense of labour wages and the environment leads down the wrong path. Good employees workers are wanted; they must find good working conditions.



EU rules are especially purposeful in terms of minimum standards and common goals. The focus is on labor law. But even where social policy is rightly carried out at member state level, the EU should work towards harmonising living conditions within Europe. The member states should be given even more support to implement social and sustainable policies - through project funding, the exchange of best practices and the promotion of a Europe-wide social policy debate.

There is an urgent need to counteract demographic trends. Many countries in Europe are affected. In the interests of European solidarity and shaping the future, everyone is obliged to recognise the achievements of families and eliminate the financial disadvantages of care work. A better work-life balance is needed. Financial relief and support for families, high-quality childcare and the guarantee of sufficient time together are the key.

The Gender-Gap in salaries and pension must be closed. Women are more often involved in "care work" and often associate their decision to have children with taking a step back in their careers. A good education system with high-quality daycare centres, schools, universities and places to gain qualifications during working life is essential. Laws on parental leave, care pension equalisation, a child-friendly tax policy and the promotion of affordable housing help enormously in reconciling work and family life. Even if family-friendly measures are not part of the EU's genuine area of competence, they can be promoted through more intensive European exchange.

The new Commission has transformed the "Green Deal" into the "Clean Industrial Deal for competitiveness and decarbonisation in the EU". This must not overshadow the human question of how the climate crisis can be overcome.



Instead, the opportunity for climate policy to promote qualitative growth must be utilised. The risk of social unrest arising from jeopardising industrial locations must be kept to a minimum. Social partners are called upon, especially in sectors that are particularly affected by structural changes.

The EU Nature Restoration Law from 2022 must remain binding for policymakers. Recycling and the circular economy are mandatory for the future: whether in construction through aggregates, recycling for appliances or repairable machines. Renewable energies for electricity, mobility, heating systems or as a production factor will be indispensable in the future. The associated technologies can trigger a surge of innovation in the economy.

Ecosystem services such as clean drinking water must be preserved, as must sustainable, regenerative agriculture that preserves the soil and the independence of food production in Europe.

Contributions of the Catholic Church

The principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social teaching is a useful guideline when deciding which tasks should be handled at EU level and which at Member State or local level.

The churches promote a Europe-wide debate on social policy. They are powerful economic and social actors that are bound by values and create values. They run schools, daycare centres, nursing homes, hospitals, counselling centres, food banks, educational institutions and much more.

Through the commandment to preserve creation, the churches also serve as role models in the environmental field. They need alliances that are committed to sufficiency.



Through the commandment of solidarity with the poor, through 'help for self-help' and through millions of volunteers who are committed to community structures, churches set standards of values. At the same time, Catholic social teaching must develop new responses to current challenges such as the flexibilisation of the world of work, the platform economy and the sharing economy. Responsible budgetary policy, including at the community level, must take greater account of intergenerational justice than is currently the case.

The decisive task of the Catholic Church is to develop the Christian view of humanity under present circumstances in such a way that social partnership is strengthened as the foundation of a productive society. In the course of industrialisation, Europe has created extreme poverty and spread much misery through colonialism; Europe must become a continent of solidarity, both internally and externally.



4 Europe needs more unity in diversity

The EU was created to overcome nationalism and achieve unity in freedom. This is what makes it so appealing. Ensuring legal certainty in migration and promoting targeted integration continues the European history of freedom.

The ethic of love for one's neighbour provides the compass for unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Challenges

Migration is part of Europe's identity. The history of Europe is a history of flight and expulsion, of mobility and encounter – and, at its best, a history of welcome and integration. Even today, people come to Europe because they are seeking protection – from war, persecution and violence, or from the loss of their livelihoods. Others come because they hope for a better life for themselves and their families. The European Union is faced with the task of reconciling different national interests with shared protection obligations.

The challenges arising from this situation are complex. Those seeking protection face high barriers to entry, unclear legal prospects, language barriers, social insecurity and societal rejection. Local authorities are reaching their limits. At the same time, political polarisation among the population is growing, fuelled by a migration debate that is narrowly focused on security issues. Where integration fails or is perceived as a one-sided imposition, tensions arise. Often, however, conflicts are deliberately fuelled in order to generate anti-democratic sentiment. The impression many people have that their state or Europe is failing to control migration and is overburdening public services can endanger democracy. It is therefore essential to clarify real problems and work on effective solutions.

The Schengen area, which guarantees freedom of travel without internal borders and is a key achievement of the EU, cannot exist without a functioning common migration and asylum policy with secure external borders. If more and more countries close their borders within the EU, Europe will fall apart.

The EU faces a threefold task: it must maintain the legal framework of protection, it must organise migration in a legally sound manner, and it must enable lasting integration.

Solutions

A European migration and integration policy must be based on human rights standards, respect for human dignity and a realistic view of social transformation processes.

This requires safeguarding the fundamental right to asylum; it also requires common, robust procedures for the reception of those seeking protection and the management of migration; it requires transparent criteria for the distribution and recognition of refugees, as well as clear access to education, work and social rights.

As guardian of the Treaties, the European Commission has a special responsibility: it is up to it to ensure that all Member States comply with applicable law. EU-wide solidarity is needed so that responsibility does not have to be shifted to third countries. National solo efforts or the externalisation of procedures undermine European cohesion in the long term.



The EU's external borders must be protected. However, the EU agency Frontex must not only protect borders, but also the fundamental rights of refugees. Action against smugglers must not be a license to carry out illegal pushbacks. The rule of law must also be fully upheld along the EU's external borders. In the event of violations of the law, the responsible governments must be appropriately sanctioned. The courts have the final say.

Ten years of border security at the EU's external borders have not created sufficient order. The number of arriving asylum seekers rises and falls. People are being driven onto even more dangerous routes and into illegality. A fundamentally new approach is needed that is not characterised by the fear of "foreign infiltration" but by the principle of the rule of law, which guarantees secure borders but also secure access. The new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum strengthens the solidarity of the member states, must prioritise the individual rights to which every person is entitled over the rights of the states.

Asylum policy must not jeopardise the European community of values. A regulated, fair and constitutionally controlled procedure is needed at the EU's external borders. This is not only in the interests of the refugees, but also in the interests of stable societies. A central building block for successful integration is the unity of the nuclear family, which is protected by the German constitution. This must be guaranteed for people fleeing war or armed conflict by means of family reunification. The long-term separation of spouses or underage children and their parents leads to considerable suffering and serious obstacles to integration, which place a burden on the whole society.

At the same time, political and administrative investment is needed in education, language support, housing and participation structures. Local authorities must be empowered to organise integration sustainably - with resources, planning security and professional support. Refugees must not become scapegoats for shortcomings in the infrastructure.

Attempts to play off the legitimate interests of the majority of the population against the requirements of a forward-looking and humane migration and integration policy must be weakened by a comprehensive social and education policy.

Integration can be shaped - if political decisions, legal framework conditions and social commitment are interlinked. Differentiated solutions are required: for vulnerable groups, for qualified immigrants, for those who have been tolerated for many years and for unaccompanied minors. It is possible to develop an efficient system for the reception of refugees, to check their status, to identify those at risk and to effectively integrate those who have been granted asylum.

Contributions of the Catholic Church

In the political debate, at national and European level, the voice of the churches is needed to put a stop to populism, xenophobia and racism and to work on constructive solutions to real problems, but also to criticise sham debates and sham solutions and to form coalitions of the sensible, willing and able. Justified concerns must be heard - through good policies and appropriate responses.



The Catholic Church in Europe – with committed believers, local structures, international networks and spiritual traditions – makes a substantial contribution to the European community when it comes to the reception and integration of refugees. It combines practical support with advocacy for human rights and social standards. Its commitment is understood as a contribution to the common good, based on Christian conviction and practical solidarity.

Concrete help is offered in language courses, learning aids, housing projects and sponsorship models - low-threshold, close to everyday life and often supported by volunteers. Counselling centres, such as those run by Caritas or the Jesuit Refugee Service, support refugees with access to social benefits, family reunification, recognition of qualifications and psychosocial stress situations. Multilingual counselling and close cooperation with government agencies enable individual support and strengthen opportunities for participation.

Numerous parishes provide accommodation, organise donations, offer childcare, language cafés and intercultural encounters. Pastoral care, educational programs and leisure projects help to ensure that refugees are not only cared for, but also feel welcome.

Church asylum provides protection in individual cases if there is a threat of serious human rights violation and other legal means have been exhausted. It must be respected by the state.

Programs such as the "Humanitarian Corridors", supported by Sant 'Egidio and church partners, among others, enable particularly vulnerable people to enter Europe safely and legally. Reception is organised in close cooperation with civil society networks, local authorities and volunteers. Church groups are also involved in the pilot project "NesT - Neustart im Team" in community sponsorships, which support new arrivals as they settle into everyday life and society.

Resettlement programs, which allow recognised refugees to live in a safe third country on a clear legal basis, are supported by church initiatives.

The crucial task of the Catholic Church is to emphasise love for one's neighbour as the defining force of political ethics. The possibilities of people and states to promote the common good are limited. Prioritisation and the effective use of available resources are therefore required. But people in need are entitled to help. Ethical responsibility and legal protection do not end at national borders. Europe is a continent deeply wounded by racism and nationalism, but also by religious conflicts, not least in Germany and emanating from Germany. All the more reason for Europe to become a continent of international understanding that proactively combats the causes of flight, respects human rights and promotes integration.

5 Europe needs more security

The EU is a peace project that must defend itself against autocratic enemies. What is needed is the concentration of all forces in order to organise security in freedom and justice. States willing to accomplish these tasks must be able to operate in the EU with majority decisions.

The biblically rooted concept of peace is salutary justice. It opens up the horizon of a defence ethic with which the EU assumes responsibility for the life, the hope and future of many people.

Challenges

Russia's aggression and the gradual withdrawal of the USA are ushering Europe into a new era in terms of security policy. Already there have been massive cyber-attacks, the severing of communication cables, hostile space activities, espionage and sabotage. There may not yet be an active war between Europe and Russia, but there is no longer peace either.

In view of the acute military and hybrid threats, new geopolitical circumstances and rapid technological developments, new solutions are needed. In an increasingly transactional world, value-led foreign policy must be further developed and combined with a far-sighted, ethically justifiable policy of interests. With regard to Ukraine, an attitude is required that combines two things: unwavering solidarity, including in the legitimate defence against the aggressor and, at the same time, a tireless effort for a just and lasting peace in a spirit of dialogue.

Peace in freedom and justice requires security. Security must be understood comprehensively. The threats posed by far-reaching weapons and terrorism, by authoritarian regimes, but also by climate and environmental destruction, including their consequences such as human rights violations and refugee movements, must be clearly recognised and specifically addressed - also by strengthening civil

defence and population protection. Military deterrence goes hand in hand with strengthening democracy, promoting social cohesion and assuming global responsibility for development.

Europe's security also depends on the global order. The future of European defence is closely linked to the strengthening of international law and international institutions (UN, OSCE, International Criminal Court). The EU is called upon to take a leading role: in advocating the validity of international law, in supporting peace initiatives, in strengthening defence alliances of democratic constitutional states.

Solutions

The current threat to a just peace in freedom and justice requires a common security and defence policy (CSDP). It integrates mediation, dialogue, peace-building, conflict transformation and military capability development.

The European Peace Facility (EPF) provides a lever. It creates a framework so that resources are available to prevent and resolve conflicts, establish and secure peace, strengthen democracy and support or restore international order. European security and defence policy needs jointly defined interests and values. It also needs the integrated structure of the North Atlantic Defence Alliance (NATO) that is more strongly supported by Europe. To achieve these goals, a multi-speed Europe is needed as long as the principle of consensus prevails in the CSDP: States that wish to do so must be able to operate in the EU with majority decisions.

A sufficient quantity and quality of armed forces in Europe is necessary in all military domains (land, air, sea, space and cyber). Joint developments based on common European standards should be the rule for any development.



Interoperability between the partner armed forces, including in digitalisation, must be ensured. European industrial core capabilities must be considered in defence planning to ensure a fair distribution of the burden.

To prevent further wars, credible deterrence is needed in conjunction with active diplomacy. It currently has a conventional and a nuclear pillar. If American forces withdraw from NATO, European responsibility will increase both for effective decision-making and command structures and for conventional and nuclear military capabilities. No country can bear this responsibility alone. The prohibition of weapons of mass destruction, which is part of Catholic social ethics and the Papal magisterium, leads to a peace policy that prevents nuclear war through deterrence and promotes nuclear disarmament in a world in which there are more and more nuclear powers.

Binding agreements and compensation mechanisms must be agreed in times of crisis. Diplomatic crisis management is required so that national egoisms are overcome by European resilience, i.e. by building up military capabilities and civilian skills that secure independence and build up resistance against aggression. This also requires a closer look at the changing needs in civil defence and civil protection. New requirements must be evaluated, coordinated across Europe and implemented in a targeted manner. The population must become more crisis-aware, resilient and thus be able to protect themselves.

Gaps that arise in NATO when treaty powers withdraw must be filled jointly by Europe. "To keep the Americans in" continues to be the goal of political endeavours. In view of American takeover plans, Canada must be more closely linked to Europe - as must all European states that are not in the EU, such as the United Kingdom.

A comprehensive defence capability involves proactive European diplomacy as well as all the economic and development aspects that belong to it. The focus of a common European defence and security policy is on both "soft" and "hard" factors. Diplomacy is one thing, military deterrence and defence capability is another; the two are inseparable.

The new strategy for security, defence and peace, which is politically necessary and ethically justified, will foreseeably make NATO, which has so far been dominated by the US, more European, make continuous use of its command structures and at the same time play a stronger role in global politics.

Contributions of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Europe contributes to defence and peacekeeping by providing value orientation: Rejecting warmongering, prioritising human dignity and reconciliation, securing freedom in justice. Christian peace initiatives have played a major role in overcoming the division of Europe, including the division of Germany. The Church's vision of a "just peace" should guide Europe's security policy so that Europe's future is not determined by the law of the strongest but by the establishment of a just peace order.

The goal of Christian ethics is peace in freedom and justice. But how peace can be created is a matter for debate. It is ethically unjustifiable to play into the hands of aggressors through passivity and to pay for peace by sacrificing human dignity. Responsibility includes using the necessary means to stand up for those in need of help and protection. "Give to everyone who asks you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you" (Gospel of Matthew 5:42).



It remains mandatory that violence is only legitimate to protect those under attack, and only when all other means have failed. In addition, the measures must remain appropriate. The aim must be to disarm the aggressor and overcome violence. International law must be respected.

In order to put a stop to aggression, protect innocent people and restore peace, military counterforce is not only permitted, but may even be necessary. On the World Day of Peace in 2000, Pope John Paul II made it clear that it is important "to educate for peace, to use diplomatic means and to make every possible effort to bring conflicting parties to the negotiating table. The development of military capabilities that serve this goal is one of the tasks of democratic states, which must coordinate better in Europe. All military planning must always be coordinated with a broad-based commitment to peace in society in order to resolve conflicts sustainably. The churches have a duty to support a common European defence policy whose means and effects remain focused on their defensive goals.

Modern technologies and strategies require the further development of the Christian peace ethic. A strong civil defence and civil protection system is an expression of love for one's neighbour in action. Ethics in military operations must be further developed in Europe, and the EU must negotiate in this direction worldwide. In his speech at the G7 summit in 2024, Pope Francis called for the rules of international law and ethical principles to be built in digitization ("legal and ethical design").

This approach must be adopted for the armed forces. Democratic control of the armed forces must be ensured in the same way as the democratic legitimacy of the entire security and defence policy.

The Christian faith has repeatedly been misused to make God a party in the struggle for one's own victory. But faith inspires ethics that provide guidance in military decisions, even in modern technologized warfare. Moreover, faith provides comfort. It creates spaces for peace actions. It establishes the hope for peace in freedom and justice.

The decisive task of the Catholic Church is to introduce a concept of peace into politics that is characterised by justice and freedom. This is the biblical heritage; it corresponds to philosophical ethics; it can be communicated to all people of good will. In the globalised world, Europe must become a continent in which differences are not seen as opposites and conflicts are not seen as disasters, but in which unity is lived in diversity, regardless of all internal tensions. All military and civilian measures must be geared towards this.

6 Europe needs more global responsibility

The EU is a political community that has assumed responsibility for the unification of Europe. It also bears responsibility for global development.

The Christian faith provides a framework of values for this responsibility. It opens our eyes to joy and hope, the concern and need of people. At the same time, it is open to a European community of values that is fuelled by diversity and strengthens what we have in common.

Challenges

A fair organisation of global relationships is a basic prerequisite for a peaceful and secure future for people in Europe. The fundamental issues of the future require international solidarity and action: Only together will it be possible to overcome the climate crisis, combat hunger, manage migration and secure our common livelihoods.

The well-being, security and development opportunities of many people are under pressure due to a variety of crises that influence each other. The successes of past decades are being cancelled out by the climate crisis and its socio-economic consequences. Experiences of violence, structural disadvantages and poverty are leading to social, economic and political crises. Spaces for civil society activities are being drastically restricted in many places. Inequality is growing both globally and within societies and the necessary solidarity mechanisms are lacking.

Services of general interest and basic needs are underfunded worldwide. The external debt of many countries in the so-called Global South means that they do not have access to sufficient liquidity. Natural disasters place an additional burden on budgets. The international financial architecture is currently unable to provide the necessary resources to the world's weakest economies.

International governance mechanisms are not reliable due to upheavals in global politics. The purpose of development cooperation is increasingly being called into question, especially in times of tight budgets. Transatlantic relations between the United States and Europe are currently facing massive challenges. In an increasingly multipolar world, Europe must place cooperation with African, Asian and Latin American countries on a new footing. Partnership must not be limited to talking to these countries when it comes to access to raw materials, managing migration and preventing illegal immigration or supporting their own positions within the UN system. What is needed is a comprehensive approach to global responsibility ethics in which economic cooperation can find orientation

Solutions

Europe, home to circa ten per cent of the world's population, is economically and politically dependent on cooperation, stable relations based on the rule of law and the defence of free societies. If it wants to find its place in a multipolar world, it must readjust its dealings with countries of the so-called Global South. It must respond appropriately to their demands for a reform of multilateral organisations, faster implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the elimination of global inequalities, as well as fair economic cooperation.

Development in the sense of the 2030 Agenda, which is committed to sustainability goals (SDGs), calls for the coherence of various policy areas in order to reduce conflicts of interest between development policy and foreign, security and economic policy interests and maximise synergies. Globalisation must be fair and environmentally friendly. Economic cooperation should serve these goals. The Treaty of Lisbon commits the member states to a trade policy that is in line with development policy goals and respects and promotes human rights.



The EU Sustainability Due Diligence Directive is an instrument for better protection of human rights, the environment and the climate in the global supply chains of European companies. It must remain in place. Due diligence obligations must cover the entire chain of activity. The necessary reduction of bureaucracy requires more effective procedures, but not the abolition or suspension of the law.

A reform of the global debt regime is needed, taking ecological and social development goals into account, because the overbearing debts of states increases poverty and inequality.

The countries of the EU have a responsibility to lead and support in terms of climate protection, in adapting to the climate crisis and in dealing with loss and damages. However, in view of geopolitical tensions and political upheavals, climate policy currently seems to be taking back seat. This makes it all the more urgent to advocate for an effective financing of climate and development cooperation, to push for an ecologically based development policy by governments and the Commission in Europe and to strengthen the commitment of civil society actors. The necessary reduction of excessive bureaucracy must not lead to effective control mechanisms being scaled back in favour of sustainability and human rights.

Contributions of the Catholic Church

With its partnerships cultivated over decades, the Catholic world church combines experience and structures to carry out solidarity work focussing on poverty reduction and human rights. The endeavour to work in partnership on an equal footing and to critically examine colonial continuities are important organisational principles.

Thanks to its global network, the Catholic Church has instruments at its disposal to speak to the conscience of the powerful in the sense of advocacy work in order to overcome the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Beyond the political conjunctures, it ensures a long-term, strategic view of international cooperation that helps to integrate various political, social and economic interests. Through his positions on socio-political and global issues, Pope Francis has provided important impetus for the committed fight against poverty, exploitation and environmental destruction. Pope Leo XIV pursues this line further. These impulses must be taken up and concretised by the Catholic Church, also in Europe.

In many countries around the world, civil society is the most important antithesis to autocratic tendencies. It often provides the key to justice, security, stability and peace. In ecumenical unity, in solidarity with other religions and in coalitions with all people of good will, the Catholic Church can and must make a contribution to strengthening civil society in countries affected by poverty and conflict, including in fragile contexts and in places that state structures cannot reach through their foreign and development policy.

The crucial task of the Catholic Church is to raise awareness of the global responsibility that makes life in the "common home" (Pope Francis) possible. The economy must and can also serve this purpose. The ecumenical project for peace, justice and the integrity of creation must be continued. Europe is a continent that consumes an above-average amount of resources; Europe must become a continent of sustainable solidarity.

7 What the ZdK stands for:

Three perspectives for a Europe of the future

The ZdK opposes all attempts to functionalise faith politically or to declare it a purely private matter. It is committed to moral universalism. The Christian faith sees this as based on the fact that every human being is made in God's image and that God's love became human in Jesus. It is in favour of making new European efforts to respect values, resolve conflicts and assume responsibility.

Respecting values

The ZdK opposes all attempts to turn the "Christian West" into a fighting concept against democracy in freedom, against the economy in solidarity, against sustainability in development, against diversity in unity, against freedom in security and against globalisation in responsibility.

The ZdK is committed to the values that characterise Europe and are shared with the whole world. These values are goods such as peace, justice, solidarity and development. They are virtues such as justice, valour, prudence and moderation. Values are achievements such as the separation of powers, international understanding, the rule of law and equal rights. Values are social gains such as education, protection of life, prevention and care. Values are relationships such as family and friendship. Last but not least, values are what is personally important and desirable, such as health and recognition, self-efficacy and success, helpfulness and gratitude. Values can be material, as they are formed through trade and change, the economy and services, so that poverty is combated and participation is promoted. Above all, values are immaterial. They are what makes life worthwhile.

The ZdK is committed to ensuring that these values are respected in Europe and worldwide. They have Christian roots and are universally human. They can be realised in Europe.

This is where democracy was invented, but also trampled on and fought for again. The social market economy was developed here and must prove itself anew in global competition. Considerable environmental damage has been caused here, which must be compensated for by transformation processes. Voluntary and involuntary migration has occurred here time and again, with major upheavals and major gains for Europe's culture. War is currently being waged here, which must be ended without aggression being rewarded. Globalisation is leading to major changes in former claims to supremacy and demands global solidarity that serves world peace.

In order to respect European values, the ZdK is guided by the words of Jesus: "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (Gospel of Matthew 25:40).

Resolving conflicts

The ZdK opposes all those who advocate thinking in terms of friend and foe as the epitome of politics, a struggle for existence as the drive for progress, scaremongering as the motivation for change, isolation from foreigners as an expression of one's own identity, a war of aggression as the best defence and a clash of civilisations as the fate of world history.

The ZdK is committed to the productivity of dealing with conflicts fairly and resolving them in a sustainable way. Some conflicts are talked up and then have to be exposed as sham conflicts. However, there are also honest conflicts of interest, genuine clashes of objectives and serious disputes about the right means.



The ZdK relies on democratic and constitutional procedures in which these conflicts are precisely named, openly discussed and transparently resolved - so that the majority decides, but the rights of the minority are safeguarded. Decisions must be valid but reversible. They must be implemented and enforced, otherwise they create new conflicts. Effective administration is therefore indispensable.

The ZdK is committed to taking a clear stance in the current conflicts being waged in and around Europe: Democracy and the rule of law must be enforced, even if economic or political interests are asserted against them. The process of economic transformation must be driven forward in a socially responsible and environmentally friendly manner, even if old industries cling to the past and new industries want to undermine the social partnership. The agreed climate targets must remain binding, even if there are strong vested interests that oppose them. Europe must become a migration-friendly continent and at the same time combat illegal immigration for the sake of legal peace and the right to asylum. Europe must be committed to a value-based foreign and peace policy, even if it has to make great efforts to secure its defence capabilities in the face of massive threats. Europe must assume international responsibility.

In order to help resolve conflicts, the ZdK is guided by the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called daughters and sons of God" (Gospel of Matthew 5:9).

Taking responsibility

The ZdK opposes all those who claim that the Sermon on the Mount cannot be used to govern the world, but also with all those who believe that ethical principles already fulfil the task of politics to promote the common good, create more justice and realise sustainability.

The ZdK is committed to a responsibility before God and humanity that is also politically effective. Democracy strengthens the principle of responsibility. The rule of law puts irresponsible politics in its place and creates scope for people with little power to assume responsibility. Economic development enables people to take responsibility for others because the satisfaction of elementary needs is organised systemically. Migration policy that neither divides a society through resentment towards foreigners nor by discrediting justified concerns, but unites it as a community of solidarity, is responsible and creates a future. Commitment to security, both civilian and military, costs a great deal of effort, but assumes responsibility and secures freedom. Global solidarity is an imperative of humanity in the one world and the only responsible response to the military, social, cultural and ecological crises of the present.

The ZdK is committed to strengthening democracy and the rule of law and adapting the social market economy in global competition to the transformation processes of the present, which are characterised by digitalisation and artificial intelligence. The ZdK is committed to combining sustainability with social justice, making migration and integration legally secure, guaranteeing defence and peacekeeping and promoting global development. Regardless of their religion, origin or gender, the ZdK supports all those who bear responsibility in politics and are committed to helping people and protecting creation.

In order to take responsibility, the ZdK is guided by the Golden Rule as formulated by Jesus: "However you want people to treat you, so treat them" (Gospel of Matthew 7:12).



Adopted by

Irme Stetter-Karp (President)
Claudia Nothelle (Vice President)
Birgit Mock (Vice President)
Thomas Söding (Vice President)
Wolfgang Klose (Vice President)
Marc Frings (Secretary General)

Drafters

Nora Bossong
Martin Buhl
Ulrich Hoffmann
Dorothee Klüppel
Clemens Ladenburger
Harald Langenfeld
Marie von Manteuffel
Hildegard Müller
Nicole Podlinski
Ansgar Rieks
Beate Rudolf
Thomas Söding
Michael Wedell

First Readers

Thomas Arnold
Maryna Czaplińska
Albrecht Prinz von Croÿ
Fabio Crynen
Regina Heyder
Claudia Lücking-Michel
Marek Misák
Linn Selle
Jérôme Vignon
Claudia Gawrich
Raphael de Araújo Bittner

Translation

Stella Carpreto

Layout

Philipp Hecker

Image sources

Page 3, Image 1:
Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock.com
Page 3, Image 5; Pages 5, 8, 24 and 25:
ZdK / Peter Bongard
Page 23: ZdK / Karl Obermayr
Page 6: Drop of Light / Shutterstock.com
All other Images: canva

Imprint

Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken
Schönhauser Allee 182
10119 Berlin
Telefon: +49 (0) 30 166 380-600
Mail: info@zdk.de
Website: zdk.de
person or entity accountable according to the German Press Law:
Britta Baas, Philipp Hecker,
Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken

ZdK.de