



**CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE
European Affairs Working Group**

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL FORUM ON EUROPE

1. The EU is in some measure the victim of its own success. Many citizens appear to take for granted an unprecedented situation whereby for half a century western Europe has been spared the horrors of war. The ease with which citizens can move freely across the continent, residing and working in countries other than their own, is assumed, particularly by the young, to be nothing out of the ordinary. Therefore, the *raison d'être* of the community, as enunciated by its founding fathers, has been largely lost sight of, as freedom of movement across the continent and open labour markets are so much taken for granted.
2. But the history of Europe over the centuries provides ample evidence to show that progress towards peace and prosperity is neither inexorable nor irreversible. Therefore, we believe that strenuous efforts must be made by governments to point out that the dangers facing the continent today are as great as ever, and that the existence of a community of nations, such as the EU, is vital if present conditions of peace and relative prosperity are to be sustained.
3. Irish enthusiasm for the union, as for the community that preceded it, has owed much to the tangible economic and social benefits that so clearly accrued from membership. Before long, however, Ireland will be a net contributor, and it is vitally important that its citizens are brought to realise that they now have an obligation to assist with the development of new member states as they themselves were helped (and are still being helped). But there are other major considerations to be borne in mind.
4. The significance of the EU as a community of values needs constantly to be declared. Hence the importance of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the purpose of which, as a protection against infringement of citizens' rights by EU legislation, is frequently misunderstood. Comparisons with the empires of the past are wide of the mark, for this is a voluntary coming-together of sovereign states who have pooled their sovereignty in the interests of the common good. Any member can leave, if so inclined.
5. Many major challenges face the modern world, and they are linked to one another. Human rights, globalization, immigration, development aid and care for the environment are interrelated. While it is essential that individual states (and indeed individual citizens) should address these concerns with energy, it is inconceivable that this can be done effectively without international co-operation, and the EU is extremely active in these spheres. Furthermore, while a variety of social models exists within the Union, a 'European model' can be discerned, common to them all, which attempts to balance matters of social justice with those of economics in a manner that is far from universal on other continents.
6. We understand the concerns of those who fear for the future of Ireland's traditional, if not always clearly defined, policy of neutrality. But we are certain that it would be morally

indefensible for any member state to refuse responsibility for the safety of its fellow-members. We suggest that, just as the political and economic climates that motivated the founding fathers of the community have changed, so too, perhaps, has the situation in which Ireland first enunciated its stance on neutrality and alignment. The time may well have come for a national debate in the Republic on the meaning and purpose of neutrality today.

7. As it has been widely acknowledged that the EU must engage more efficiently with its citizens, we would hope that the institutions will move to establish the ‘open’ and ‘regular’ dialogue with the churches that was provided for in the Treaty, despite the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Treaty. We appreciate the fact that the Irish government is taking steps to establish such procedures nationally in the Republic.