



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

Executive Summary

The European scene has been dominated for the past year by the fate of the proposed Constitutional Treaty that was rejected by the electorates of France and the Netherlands, creating a situation of great uncertainty as to the future development of the European Union. We have followed the course of these events as closely as possible, particularly through participation in discussions in Brussels under the auspices of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches and by means of our membership of the National Forum on Europe and the Institute for European Affairs in Dublin.

The Constitutional Treaty

Following the rejection of the treaty by two member states, the Union initiated a 'period of reflection', on the future of the continent and on what steps might most appropriately be taken to achieve the objectives of the treaty, prominent among which were a consolidation of a great mass of EU regulations that had accrued over the years, and modifying procedures to allow for the efficient conduct of a greatly-enlarged Union. Particularly on the part of the churches, there is a strong desire to ensure the survival of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and implementation of the undertaking provided for in the treaty to establish regular consultation between the agencies of the Union and the churches.

National Forum on Europe

The Irish government has looked to the National Forum on Europe (of whose Special Observer Pillar the Church of Ireland is a member) to promote this reflection among the citizens of the Republic. The Forum is hoping to engage more fully with the component parts of civil society, such as the churches and, in response to an invitation, we are considering possible ways in which appropriate structures within the Church might co-operate in this exercise. The Forum invited submissions on issues facing Europe, especially related to enlargement, the social model, globalisation, and the environment, and copy of our submission is appended. (see Appendix B).

MEPs

As reported last year, we met with a cross-party group of MEPs in Dublin last year. We have already met with one MEP from Northern Ireland at the Commission Office in Belfast, and have sought meetings with the others.

Institute for European Affairs

The Institute of European Affairs in Dublin continues to provide a very full programme of lectures and seminars, which explore issues including those relating to enlargement, usually with the participation of representatives of the new member states or candidate states. Turkey's candidature is a particularly controversial one, as was clear from the debate on our report at last year's session of the General Synod and the Institute has been addressed by the President of Turkey.

Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA)

At their request, the working group met with members of the Peace and Neutrality Alliance.