



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

The most significant developments in the European Union in the year under review were the enlargement of the Union by the accession of ten new members during the Irish Presidency and the agreement on a 'Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe' concluded by the heads of government of the twenty-five members states on 18 June, also during the Irish presidency.

Both issues, enlargement and the constitutional treaty, were the subject of numerous meetings and discussions under the auspices of the National Forum on Europe and the Institute for European Affairs, and the committee was represented on most occasions.

The constitutional treaty will be put to the electorate in referendums in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the working-group sees it as its role to attempt to identify and clarify the issues of most concern to church members, and to stimulate well-informed discussion. As a step towards doing so we are in the process of arranging (with the co-operation of the Office of the European Parliament in Dublin) a meeting with the Members of the European Parliament representing both jurisdictions. The agenda for this meeting will include topics suggested by ourselves and by the MEPs.

The enlargement process is still under way, with Romania and Bulgaria expected to join within the next few years. The candidacy of Turkey is the subject of more controversy than that of most other states, because, for instance, of the difference that its membership would make to the religious composition of the EU. However, the Union has decided to engage in discussions with Turkey and it will be important for the Christian churches to consider carefully the issues that will undoubtedly be the object of considerable debate in the public arena.

We were invited to comment on a document entitled *Taking our place in Europe-Northern Ireland's European Strategy*, prepared by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and our response is appended. In July, the chairman of the working-group, Dr Milne, attended a meeting in London on 'The EU constitution- the moral dimension', organised by the Wyndham Place Charlemagne Trust.