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## **Bratislava Declaration by the Kolping Society Europe**

### **“Liberty obliges – Shaping the future in a responsible way”**

For Europe, the year 1989 is the symbol of profound changes. For more than forty years, Europe was divided into two power blocks and the Eastern part was dominated by Communist regimes. The so-called Iron Curtain traversed the entire continent and in order to overcome it, the people from the East risked their lives. In the end, the Iron Curtain collapsed thanks to their “Bread and Freedom Movement”.

In this *annus mirabilis*, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe were successful in changing the political and societal structures of their countries by means of peaceful and Velvet Revolutions and in claiming greater freedoms for the people. These revolutions were proof of the fact that Socialism with its understanding of man and society was unable to meet the expectations and the requirements of the people. An understanding of man which considers the individual only to be an instrument and part of a societal entirety, and which disregards the free decision and the personal and inalienable responsibility of the individual for achieving the common good, does not meet up with the human person as an Individual and a Social human being. With the longing for more freedom, for the observance of the human rights and for more social justice, the people opened up ways for the political changes, which tore down the Iron Curtain and which made the new political unity in Europe possible twenty years ago.

#### **Disenchanted Expectations**

Today – twenty years after this predominantly peaceful change – it shows, however, that for the people in Europe not all of the expectations became true, which the Velvet Revolutions had kindled. Admittedly, the newly gained freedom did enable more opportunities for the political co-determination, but very soon particular interests showed once again and it became evident that many citizens did not consider the newly gained freedom to be an opportunity and an obligation for more co-responsibility for the common good, but rather only considered it to be an expansion of their individual options for action. In some of the European countries, the transformation of the economy led to new power structures, due to a lack of an organizational framework securing the market economy and to fatal consequences for the social justice.

Within the scope of the overall globalization, an economy which eludes its overall societal responsibility led to new forms of social ostracism, of instability and insecurity and to a continuing reduction of the possibilities of politics at national level with regard to the social balancing between the individual groups of society.

As a consequence of the increasing insecurity and the growing social cleavage between the groups of society, the support of the pluralist democracy as a form of government markedly declined and populist and forces hostile to democracy gain influence. In view of this development, it is necessary to remind the people of the basic aims which they had in 1989 and together to look for ways as to how and under which circumstances the expectations of the people – who were co-authors of the Revolution at that time – can be fulfilled.

Already in 1996, the Kolping Society of Europe in its Salzburg Manifesto pointed to some of the basic conditions which have to be fulfilled if in Europe a political and societal system of freedom, of human rights, of peace and of social justice is to be ensured. In view of the current developments, it especially recalls the following subjects.

### **Safeguarding democracy**

The historic experiences show that the representative democracy is the form of government which secures best the freedom of the citizens, the personal dignity and the individual human rights and by which a common good which goes beyond the individual groups of society can be best achieved. At the same time, the historical experience confirms that a representative democracy is only viable and capable of acting, if it is supported by the citizens who do not understand their rights of freedom to be a dogmatization of the freedom of the individual, but rather also recognize and assume their social responsibility according to the Christian image of man. Therefore, the Kolping Society considers it to be a big responsibility reminding its members of both dimensions of the Christian image of man and to point to the consequences resulting from them for the actions of the individual. It will continue to encourage its members to think, speak and act in a jointly responsible way in the society and for an active democratic commitment.

In accordance with the Catholic Social Teaching, the Kolping Society of Europe is guided by an understanding of the state in which the state is asked – by means of the creation of a suitable system of rules – to bring the forces of the market economy and the dynamic of the market into a balance with the legitimate claims for social justice. The current crisis of the finance and the crisis of the real economy resulting from it, make it clear what the consequences are if the forces of the market are not bound into a steady regulation framework. In the times of the globalization the international community has to take on the task, along with the national states, to integrate the processes of the global economic and financial system into an organizational framework in such a way that they are aimed at the common good of the family of the human kind.

If one would like to ensure the consent of the citizens to a democratic order permanently, then the state also has to ensure a minimum of social security. In the process, also the forces of the civil society have some importance according to the principle of subsidiarity, which encourage and enable the citizens to self-help and by independent solidarity-based networks. Through the independent take-over of societal tasks they ensure the freedom space of the citizens and are meant to prevent the state from an excessive demand. As an organization of the civil society, the Kolping Society of Europe itself is ready to take on societal tasks in the area of education and the social welfare on its own authority.

## **Strengthening of the families**

The family has a key role in the functioning of society. It is, as the Catholic Social Teaching stresses, the fundament of every society. Even though the image of the family and the form of the family in Europe markedly changed in the last few decades, however, the marriage based on the linkage of a man and a woman which is expanded by children to form a family, nevertheless continues to be the most stable form of a family and takes on far-reaching functions for the society. Families offer their children the emotional and social backing which is important for their development and they are a learning space for passing on basic values and a place for the practice of lived solidarity. They ensure the solidarity of the generations among one another and through the lived solidarity in the families they also contribute to the coverage of life's risks such as old age, illness and care dependency. These benefits of the family are indispensable also in the times of the institutionally guaranteed solidarity and ensure a high degree of human dignity also in difficult life situations.

The Kolping Society of Europe considers the promotion of the families through educational work, the mergence of families into solidarity-based networks and the championing for the interests of the families in politics to be an important task. It will continue to strive for keeping up the awareness of the vital role of the family for the individual within and for the society, to empower the individual for his duties in the family, to support the cohesion of the family members by means of accompanying educational and leisure time offers, to collaborate in the creation of networks of families and to put themselves out for a subsidiary support of the families by means of politics. The Kolping Society also considers it to be a special task to accompany single parents and the solidarity-based attendance of family members of split-up families.

## **Work and Employment**

Work and employment have a central role for the social peace in a society. Even though according to a Christian understanding work is more than just gainful employment, however, the lack of gainful employment or of decent gainful employment has become one of the greatest worries of the citizens in Europe. Due to an increasing globalization, more and more jobs in the area of the productive industry are cut in Europe; the remaining jobs are often linked to such low incomes that the working population is unable to finance its livelihood for itself and their families and thus has to be supplemented by federal assistance. Many of those developments are due to the fact that man no longer has the preference in the production process – which he deserves – ahead of the other factors of production and the interest of the capital and excessive expectations for returns of the capital lead to the extermination of jobs and to unsuitable working conditions.

In the times of the globalization, solutions in the area of work and employment cannot be reached alone at continental level. Therefore, the Kolping Society of Europe demands the global implementation of the core labour standards and increased efforts of the international community of states for the implementation of the basic principles of the ILO for Decent work.

In Europe, the Kolping Society supports all of the efforts in the area of education and itself offers educational measures, to ensure the chances of the people for a job by means of a higher qualification. At the same time the Kolping Society supports the efforts of the workers to represent their interests in a better way through cohesion and helps people on their way into the economic independence. The Kolping Society expects from politics a consistent promotion of new technologies, which ensure a high degree of employment, as well as ensuring the necessary advanced occupational qualification of the workers, as well as the limitation of the bureaucracy which are a burden for the economy and the regulations of the job market.

## **Development and global responsibility**

Europe is bound in manifold ways to other parts of the world. Many political and social developments – which originated in Europe – gained universal meaning, and Europe feels bound through common values, such as for example the human rights, with people from all parts of the globe. Many of these people are – however – without sufficient living and development opportunities and Europe is also in view of its own history and through its defining values co-responsible for showing its solidarity also to these people. The dependency which grows within the scope of the globalization requires a growing international solidarity as a counterbalance.

The Kolping Society of Europe puts itself out for helping to overcome the unjust structures worldwide, by means of increased measures within the scope of development cooperation and to offer new opportunities for development to those peoples and people who are marginalized. This also requires the creation of a just economic order which improves the chances for the poor countries for an access to the world markets. By means of suitable measures the climate change which was caused by man has to be stopped, which affects the poor countries in a special way, which, however, are not the dominant causers of the climate change. Europe is asked to offer those people wanting to immigrate into Europe an Asylum system which respects the human rights and to see to it that the movements which are underlying the migration are removed. The Kolping Society Europe will in a special way also turn to these people who immigrate into Europe and help them with their integration.

The Kolping Society of Europe will also in the future make an effort to

- Enable its members to active and responsible democratic actions,
- To strengthen the family as a fundamental element of society,
- To implement the basic principles of Decent work,
- To alert the responsibility of the citizens for global social justice and for an efficient policy against climate change

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