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50th Anniversary of the Treaties of Rome – The Kolping Society is taking a stand

The Treaties of Rome signed on 25 March 1957 established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community. Together with the European Coal and Steel Community which had been set up earlier they provide the heart and the basis of the European integration process. The preamble of the EEC-Treaty describes the objectives which continue to determine the European integration process:

- the promotion of economic and social progress of the countries
- the constant improvements of the living and working conditions,
- the preservation of peace and liberty,
- the establishment of the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.

A lot has been achieved in the past fifty years and the citizens of Europe have every reason to be proud of the outcome of the European integration process. After all, the member states of the European Union are a part of the world where the rule of law, democracy and freedom have been accomplished to a large extent, where peace has been secured and the European economic and social model has been dedicated to the objective of social justice.

Despite this success an increasing number of citizens is sceptical of the European integration process and its further expansion because on the one hand they take the accomplishments for granted and on the other hand they are afraid that the EU is not in a position to respond to the new challenges of an increasing globalisation.

The European integration process itself is undergoing a crisis because it risks being overstretched as a result of the enlargement. In addition, the expectations that the individual

member states have of the European Union differ more and more, and this at a time when the European Union is lacking a firm and final basis and the necessary reforms to strengthen the decision-making process. This crisis has become particularly evident in the current failure of the European Constitutional Treaty. Despite this crisis there is no doubt that the European Union has not only been a response to the self-destructive wars in Europe which were the result of excessive nationalism but it has also been a convincing answer to the profound changes in international politics.

To achieve the objectives laid down in the preamble of the EEC-Treaty, the European Union has to face the challenge of

- outlining future perspectives of European integration which will not water down the current state of political integration and which will at the same time help to move European integration forward by promoting a closer cohesion between individual member states.
- promoting a transparent decision-making process in the European Union and eliminating the existing democracy deficit.
- strengthening the European Social Model and providing the business community with a regulatory framework which strengthens the competitiveness of Europe without losing sight of the aim of social equality and social justice and of the tradition of a humanistic working culture.
- achieving greater harmonisation among the social and economic policies of the member states to prevent a ruinous competition between the different economies for lower tax rates and social standards.
- addressing the demographic problems of Europe by strengthening marriage and the family and by providing more efficient support to families with children.

Kolping Europe is committed to a continuation of the European integration process. It is guided by the vision of a federal Europe where the principle of subsidiarity is consistently applied in the allocation of responsibilities for the different areas of politics and where the objectives of the preservation of peace and liberty, the promotion of economic and social progress and the improvement of living and working conditions continue to be the guiding principles of policy-makers.

These objectives, however, can be achieved only on a common foundation of values which is deeply rooted in the respect for human rights and which has been firmly anchored in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The preservation of this foundation of values and the further development of European unification is not only the responsibility of politicians but of all European citizens.

The Kolping Society is facing this challenge. Based on its Christian values it will focus on the following tasks:

1. Defense of human dignity

The respect for human dignity irrespective of sex, age, religion and ethnic origin has been and continues to be the central task in preserving the foundation of values of the European Union. However, this dignity is increasingly threatened at the beginning and at the end of life and the value and the dignity of human life is subordinated to economic interests and expediency.

2. Promotion of marriage and family

Throughout the generations and cultural areas the concept of marriage and family has been accepted as a way of life providing space for human warmth and solidarity and a place where people take on responsibility for each other and where the solidarity between generations can be practiced and lived. This experience which is fundamental to the process of civilisation cannot be gained in other groups of society practising a different lifestyle, which, for this reason, are not entitled to institutional protection and support as it is given to families. In their families young people learn that freedom, responsibility and mutual respect are indispensable if they want to live together peacefully. Families therefore create the cultural conditions which provide the foundation for any system based on freedom.

3. Commitment to the principles of freedom and democracy

The freedom of people is an integral part of their human dignity and individuality. However, they risk losing their personal freedom in certain social and political systems or they may fail to use newly developing freedoms in a responsible way. Freedom is inextricably linked with social responsibility. Freedom without social bonds will invariably result in a destruction of this freedom as the individual will always be dependent on others. Unlike all other political systems, the system of democracy provides the biggest guarantee of the freedom of the

individual. The commitment to preserve democracy and to enable citizens to act democratically is therefore also a commitment to fight for personal freedom which must be exercised in a responsible way.

4. Strengthening solidarity

Apart from freedom, solidarity and a sense of responsibility are other central features of human dignity and the Christian concept of life. Solidarity, which begins at home, in the families must gain a global dimension in communities practicing it. To practice solidarity in Europe and to share with others requires a detailed knowledge of the way of life in the different parts of Europe and the realization that the challenges of a globalised world can be faced only if we act together. If we want solidarity to prevail in Europe we must discover the things we have in common.

5. Fight for greater social justice

Justice as it is practiced in a society does not only provide the basis for social peace in a society but also for the acceptance of a political and social order by its citizens. In the past few years we have experienced a serious income gap in Europe which has resulted in a reduced support for the EU by its citizens. It is therefore crucial to strengthen the principles of distribution, participation and solidarity between generations and to use them as the guiding principles in politics and social life.

6. Commitment to preserve cultural identities and strengthen a sense of belonging

The growing globalisation lets individuals despair at the political decisions that affect their personal lives and that they cannot influence. They feel increasingly disoriented and powerless. By contrast, people are longing for the security of a place where they feel at home. This place is often linked with their regional and national culture. This proves that people need to go back to their cultural roots if they want to face the growing challenges of a globalised world. On a global scale, this sense of belonging can be strengthened by encouraging people to remember the common roots of European culture in classical antiquity, the Christian Jewish heritage and the Enlightenment.

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the European Treaties, Kolping Europe calls upon all its members and groups to become increasingly involved in the discussions about

the future shape of the European Union, the limits to its expansion and the solutions to the current challenges and problems. As a Catholic social organisation the Kolping Society is committed to making a contribution to the further development of the European integration process and to the preservation of the values which provide the basis for the integration process.

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