

FINAL PRESS RELEASE

COMECE Bishops concerned about rise of populist movements in Europe

The Autumn Plenary session of COMECE met from 24 to 26 November in Brussels. It reflected on the topic of populism, which was introduced and presented by Prof. Dr. Frank Decker, University of Bonn, Prof. Dr. Bart Pattyn, University of Louvain and Prof Dr. Chantal Delsol, University of Marne-la-Vallée. The Bishops adopted the following statement:

Assessment

We notice a significant increase of movements and tendencies with “populist” characteristics in countries throughout the EU.

This phenomenon is very complex: it has a variety of manifestations, from certain forms of regionalism to nationalism and also extremism; it spans from the left to the right of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, there are striking similarities: a simplified presentation of problems and solutions, the search for scapegoats, the instrumentalised distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’.

A concern for Christians

We are deeply concerned because this phenomenon tends:

- to divide societies and undermine social cohesion and solidarity
- to discriminate against the weakest in society: minorities which are labelled as scapegoats
- to offer the illusion of simplistic solutions to complex problems

We recall that populism is the very opposite of the European idea, which has its roots in the notion of solidarity.

We regret that even some Christians are tempted to follow these trends. Populism is truly incompatible with the universal vocation of the Church.

A commitment

Being faithful to our vocation, we will continue :

- to promote intercultural dialogue in fraternity and truth
- to encourage Christians to further civil and social engagement at the service of their neighbour
- to reinforce our efforts in education for responsibility

We realise the uncertainty and insecurity of the present time. Yet we call upon Christians to resist the pull of populism and to swim against the tide: the Gospel calls us to do this today as it did former generations. Not in order to engage in a battle of cultures or ideologies, but rather to lay down the principles that are at the root of everything: the steadfast **dignity of every human person** – as so loved and wished for by God – and the **common good**, which reminds us time and again to show solidarity and to love our neighbour.