

Report by the President of Caritas Europa

End of a mandate

At the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis of 2011, and after four years, the mandate of the current Executive Board of Caritas Europa will come to an end. Together with eight member organisations (members ExBo: Italy, Germany, France, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Spain, Norway) we took responsibility for these last four years. France was represented on the Executive Board by respectively Jean-Pierre Richer, Daniel Verger and Catherine Soublin. Spain was represented by Silverio Agea, often accompanied by Natalia Peiro, and later by Sebastián Mora. Kari-Mette Eidem, who represented Caritas Norway, served as a Vice-President of Caritas Europa. I want to express my sincere thanks to these three member organisations leaving the Executive Board of Caritas Europa in 2011 and to the different people serving on their behalf. My gratitude goes as well to the other five member organisations continuing to serve on the Executive Board during the next mandate 2011-2015. After the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Poland, Caritas Belgium and Caritas England and Wales will join the Executive Board of Caritas Europa. From among the eight Board members, four will also serve in the Executive Committee of Caritas Internationalis under the current statutes: Poland, Slovenia, Germany and Italy. In case the draft Statutes of Caritas Internationalis will be approved by the General Assembly and the Holy Father, together with the revised Internal Rules, the European region will be represented in future by three member organisations only. As Caritas Poland and Caritas Slovenia got the same number of votes, our region will “ad cantelem” proceed to a vote determining which of these two will then continue to serve in the Executive Committee of Caritas Internationalis.

My gratitude goes as well to Marius Wanders, who finished his mandate as our Secretary General last year, and to the Secretary General elected Jorge Nuño Mayer who was fortunately able and willing to step into our organisations one year earlier than foreseen. Thanks to him and his family, Caritas Europa did not suffer under this unforeseeable departure of Marius Wanders, who will remain in our minds and in our heart as a person dedicated to the Caritas family and the people who we serve. Thank you Marius and thank you Annemarie!

Major achievements

(1) Zeroing poverty

The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was fully used by Caritas Europa to make its positions and convictions heard at all levels. The Zero poverty study ‘Poverty Among Us’, together with various thematic papers constitute the result of competent work and commitment of the Social Policy Commission and the Social Policy Team in Brussels. We were able to deliver 135.500 signatures at the end of the European Year. Caritas in Europe and Caritas Europa are now more than ever before recognised as a network able to effectively reach politicians, the media and the general public.

(2) Migrants, refugees, Roma people are part of our society

Migrants, refugees and Roma people belong to the most vulnerable groups within our European societies. The way in which they are accepted and allowed to enter our societies is more than a symbolic expression about the identity of our societies. Are we welcoming and open societies or simply closed ones? The challenge of living in one inclusive society was taken into account and integrated into our Caritas Europa efforts with specific regard to those vulnerable groups. Serving refugees and migrants is serving the whole society.

(3) Fighting poverty worldwide

The European Union and the European Caritas members are often praised as champions of humanitarian relief and development work in the whole world. Their efforts indeed contribute enormously to alleviate misery and poverty. Working with new, dynamic and flexible methods

and structures, the efforts of the European Caritas organisations with regard to influencing national, European and global anti-poverty strategies and policies have become better aligned and more effectively coordinated with the efforts of Caritas Internationalis. In future, this alignment and coordination of national, regional and global advocacy efforts against poverty will need to be further built upon and strengthened.

(4) Inclusion

We were able to successfully run an important program during the last three years in which 17 member organisations in EU member states actively participated.

INCLUSION I aimed to strengthen the knowledge in our MO regarding European social policy development and the role therein for civil society at national level. Colleagues from an average of 16 different EU member states fully participated in at least three major capacity building events that were organised per year to this end. Throughout the three years, Caritas Europa contributed to 17 important public consultations on a diversity of social policy issues launched by the European Commission with strong input from the member organisations. Twelve thematic position papers on themes varying from Home Care and Migration to the analysis of poverty in the recent Poverty Among Us paper were developed by thematic working groups and disseminated in the network as solid basis for advocacy at national and European level. An external evaluation of the three INCLUSION years underlined that this project – and especially our joint ZERO POVERTY year has done much to not only strengthen / consolidate the network but also enhance visibility of the national Caritas' as members of a strong Europe wide organisation.

(5) A professional website documenting Caritas Europa's work

The website of Caritas Europa has continuously evolved to become an effective tool of information sharing and documentation about activities of Caritas Europa and its structures and of activities in member organisations.

(6) Common Management Standards

A strong network is built by building the strength of the member organisations. The adoption and subsequent process of ratification of Common Management Standards and of entering into peer review processes has to be considered a good success produced through the effort of the Commission of Internal Networking and the relevant staff in Caritas Europa secretariat in Brussels and Prague. Living the ecclesial community, joint actions and activities like the publication and joint meeting with regard to "Do not deny justice to your poor people, proposals for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU" are eloquent examples of how the reading of the holy scriptures and study of Catholic Social Teaching can inform and transform our political advocacy work in Brussels, in Strasbourg and in the different capitals of Europe.

Overview of the past year

(0) The Executive Board

Since the Regional Conference in El Escorial (June 2010), the Executive Board elected for the 2007–2011 mandate period has met five times for ordinary sessions: 28th-29th June 2010 in Oslo (Norway), 28th-29th September 2010, 15th-16th December 2010, 1st-2nd March 2011 and 11th-13th April 2011 (all in Brussels).

Without being able to go into every topic here, I would like to highlight and systematically deal with five topics. The main focuses of the work of the Executive Board were as follows:

- (1) Directing and accompanying the process of transition of management responsibility from outgoing Secretary General Marius Wanders to incoming Secretary General Jorge Nuño Mayer

(2) Initiating and accompanying a process of reviewing the financial management processes of Caritas Europa with the help of an external expert from a member organisation

(3) European Year 2011 on Volunteering

For Caritas, volunteering is a part of its values and identity; the personal commitment of Christians and citizens with people in situation of poverty or exclusion, an action of solidarity. Volunteers are an essential part of Caritas' actions. Caritas Europa has been seizing the opportunity of this European Year to express a heartfelt gratefulness to all those who through their commitment in a spirit of unselfish gratuity contribute to a better world for so many co-citizens who dwell at the margins of society. During the year Caritas Europa has been supporting those Caritas organisations who wish to give a European dimension to their initiatives. Throughout the year, a Caritas Working group has been bringing together a number of Caritas organisations to reflect on common approach in volunteering management and a Position Paper was already elaborated to address the European Union as well as Council of Europe. Caritas Europa is supporting organisation of a number of events such as International Symposium in Freiburg (30 May – 1 June); Summer University in Leuven (11-15 July) and EYV2011 event in Strasbourg (3-5 December). At the end of the year, a publication will be elaborated to reflect the main results of the Volunteering activities and the policy messages and recommendations that have been formulated during the year.

(4) Monitoring the Strategic Planning Process / New strategic planning process
Caritas Europa

Since October 2010 Caritas Europa is developing a strategic planning process. The new Strategic Framework 2011-2020 needs a broad consensus in the network, so that the participation of member organizations and working groups has been crucial for the success. Questionnaires to all member organizations, the so called Crossroads Forum, where most of European Caritas directors met, as well as meetings from the CE working groups (social policy, migration, international cooperation, internal networking) have ensured the designing process. Caritas directors all over Europe and external experts have assessed and proofread the final draft. The Executive Board meeting, 11-13 April, has come up with the final document for its approval during the Regional Conference in Mai. The new Strategic Framework 2011-2020 foresees key priority functions to tackle with the challenges of our fast changing environment, but also the main methods for its implementation. Caritas Europa expects so to have a clear and focused guideline for the coming years.

(5) Member Organisations in difficulties

More than a dozen of member organisations are experiencing difficult situations in their organisations. Governance, management and financial difficulties are a matter of concern not only for the Executive Board but also for the whole Caritas family. What affects one member, affects also the others. The fraternal support and the commitment with the viability and sustainability of all Caritas organisations in Europe are an increasing challenge for all of us.

Meetings attended and trips made for Caritas Europa

A list of the meetings which the president attended and of the trips he made for Caritas Europa, will be available at the secretariat of Caritas Europa for those who want a copy of it.

Actively participating in Caritas Internationalis

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Outlook

Our call for “zero poverty” will be taken to the international level where it will find an echo in the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis in Rome, where the campaign “zero poverty –

one human family” will be launched. We will be able to bring our ZERO POVERTY thoughts and actions to Rome to be shared with our world wide family.

But we also want to recognise and honour all those people who participate daily in the fight against poverty as volunteers. They deserve to be made visible by us in 2011, the European Year of Volunteering, not as stopgaps for unpaid social work, but as bearers of a culture of gift and love, that Pope Benedict XVI defines as the “principle of gratuitousness” and the “expression of fraternity” (CiV, 34). To invest in such a culture means to invest in concrete people and communities.

And that is exactly what God did when he gave us his Son. Not another humanity, but a new humanity should come into being. It has been born in Jesus Christ. It was resurrected in him. It lives in his Church as an expert of humanity.

Luxemburg, March 22nd 2011

Erny Gillen

President