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Press Release

The *Groupe Européen de la Pastorale Ouvrière* (GEPO) [European Group for Worker Pastoral, also referred to as the European Group for Pastoral Work] met in Manchester (United Kingdom) from 15 to 17 November 2018 for its annual symposium. The topic of the symposium was “A social Europe, workers’ movements and social dialogue: a joint vision of the European Pillar of Social Rights?” The assembly drew on the presentations and discussions to articulate a message for the attention of its structures and member and Christian associations engaged in the world of work.

Final message of the symposium

Many countries have opted for governments that have been critical of and even openly against the European adventure. Many citizens who are concerned about their future are seeking refuge in a nationalist or populist vision. They are hoping to find protection against the consequences of globalization and the re-emergence of areas of solidarity at national level in an illusory “return to the past.”

We are aware that too many people in Europe have seen their livelihood battered by the successive crises and that Europe was unable to guarantee supranational solidarity for all citizens. But we are convinced that the solution can only be found by creating a common economic and social area. This area must become one of solidarity and justice for all men and women, indigenous people and migrants, denizens of rich regions and those living in the periphery. The attainments from the construction of social Europe will be secured and sustained through a new pact that will take better account of the aspirations of each and every citizen for a good and decent life.

The initiative of the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker to create a pillar of social rights is a starting point that should be welcomed. The implementation of a common policy on social rights must be accorded a place among European priorities at least equivalent to that of the completion of the single market.

In view of the stated intentions, the time has now come to define in concrete terms the measures needed to create a European single solidarity area. It is possible to reach an agreement, from North to South and East to West, on good and decent working conditions so that everyone can be assured a high degree of protection, be able to participate in all dimensions of social life, and aspire to a happy life for himself and his family.

We want to see inequalities reduced on a massive scale in this European area for the benefit of the largest number of people. It is a precondition that has to be met if Europeans are to regain their optimism for and faith in European integration. In a large number of fields, the national States must also assume their

Groupe Européen de Pastorale Ouvrière (GEPO) [European Group for Worker Pastoral]
 Registered Office: 17 Rue de l'Ecole, L -3385 Noertzange
 Secretariat: Pontien Kabongo, 65 Rue du Village
 B -5310 Noville sur Mehaigne
 E-mail: pontien.kabongo@minyaku.org and claud.holper@cj23.lu

responsibilities, in line with the duly appreciated principle of subsidiarity. The aim is to subscribe to the idea of convergence for the implementation of social rights at a high level in all countries.

The GEPO has stated that the social issue must be at the same level of importance as the economic issue. Work is an elementary right and we underscore the primacy and dignity of every person in economic development. The aim of economic activities should be and always remain the common good. We call for the implementation of an innovative policy to give concrete shape to the aspirations set out in the Declaration of the European Social Pillar. Our proposals are based on the social doctrine of the Church.

In concrete terms, we call for:

As regards the social dialogue:

- Expanding the social dialogue to all the dimensions of social life such as culture, citizenship, the discussion on intergenerational and migratory challenges;
- Substantial investment in training on the social dialogue so as to authorize all to participate in the social dialogue;
- A presence in the social media to use the channels of communication of young generations so as to integrate them in the social dialogue;
- Ensuring that the dialogue is open, straightforward and shared. The aim must be to protect human dignity for all.

As regards wages:

- Implementing a constraining mechanism for calculating the minimum wage in all EU countries. This calculation must be based on a needs assessment regarding fundamental rights (food, housing, culture, health, training, communication and mobility). For each country, the price of this common European assessment base will be calculated and converted into a salary;
- Granting a public allowance for children, on the same principle as an assessment for age;
- Effective mechanisms to be put in place in each country to ensure that the salary range approaches the one in ten factor.

As regards the balance between “private life and work”

- The implementation of a single legislation on the opening hours of shops in Europe
- Launching an awareness raising campaign about hyperconnection
- Guaranteeing access to public child minding services everywhere
- Making “zero hour” contracts illegal in Europe. The timetables must be known in advance in consultation with the employee
- A harmonization and reduction of working time everywhere in Europe with the obligation of compensatory hiring without loss of salary.

Our lines of action for the different types of pastoral work are to:

- Meet the political parties to motivate them to speak out on European social rights in their campaign for the European elections in 2019
- Undertake a commitment with all the organisations in the world of work to build this European pillar of social rights, and give it a concrete and constraining content so that European policy can stand guarantee for supranational solidarity and social justice
- Mobilize and train our members so that they can serve as “multipliers” in this mobilization campaign to put in place the European social pillar;

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- Campaign during the European elections of May 2019 to give greater weight to elected officials who embark on a path for social justice in Europe. We are going to fight against all the populist and nationalist forces that are leading Europe towards the abyss
- Side decidedly with the weakest segments of the population who are the most vulnerable in the world of work (single women, unskilled workers, persons who are sick, the long-term unemployed, migrants) so that they can regain their dignity and place in that Europe