



PROTECTING EUROPE'S MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCES AT A TIME OF CRISIS

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Eurodiaconia, a community of Christian organisations and diaconal actors committed to a Europe of solidarity, equality and justice, has issued this declaration on the occasion of its Annual General Meeting, to call for policies and actions that enable inclusion, care and empowerment of the vulnerable and excluded in society while ensuring dignity for all.

We believe it is time for all of us to question and re-evaluate our values and objectives as a society in order to define responses that ensure people's well-being remains the first priority.

EUROPE IN CRISIS AND THE CHALLENGES IT PRESENTS

Europe is threatened by a crisis of the financial system, of our values, of our rights and of our social protection systems. This has exposed weaknesses, which have for some started a seemingly never ending spiral of debt, recession, isolation, disaffection, unemployment and poverty – and further more, a threat of political instability.

While the financial and economic crisis has in many ways shown these weaknesses more clearly, they existed before this crisis and our concern is for the social challenges we now face in our society.

Even at times of crisis, there is always hope, and we wish to share not only our analysis of this situation and its impact on people but also provide suggestions and inspiration based on our experience as diaconal actors from across Europe.

The crisis and challenge for our values

As a society we each need to reflect on the fundamental notion of values in our current context. We need to think how our values have been challenged and from where these challenges have come from. We need to think how our current choices affect our values such as solidarity, stability, peace, integration, social cohesion and well-being. These are fundamental questions that deserve long and sustained discussion by all.

Nevertheless, since the start of the crisis, many people have dared to imagine change: change towards a more equal society and for alternatives to growth at all costs. Many have found this questioning silenced by the claim for fiscal consolidation which has often taken place without any consideration of the social impact.

As a result, the welfare system is facing many challenges with a stronger focus put on individual responsibility without increased resources and on the conditionality of social benefits which can lead to a greater individualisation of social risks. This has contributed to the emergence of a deep crisis of confidence in political process and solidarity, generating an erosion of trust and escalating polarization in society across Europe. This is reflected in a crisis of responsibility and solidarity, as people feel more and more distant from each other and move away from a willingness to “contribute” to society. An invaluable sense of community is gradually being eroded.

The crisis and challenge for rights

Following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other texts, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights introduced social, economic, and cultural rights into the European primary law through the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, as a result Europe seemed to be progressing toward the strengthening of social rights. But today, the concept of the social contract is highly under pressure due to the double threat of weakening social rights, and democratic deficit as the value of political participation is increasingly questioned.

The definition of social rights is being narrowed by financial justifications, for instance through decreasing pensions or limiting access to health care. As a consequence, people feel increasingly excluded from the



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mainstream political parties and decision making processes which have not responded to their needs and gradually turn toward alternative movements or extremist parties.

The crisis and challenge for social protection and services

This crisis of rights is clearly manifested in the social services sector. Eurodiaconia members testify of the increasing demand for social services and in particular debt related services, emergency financial support, homelessness services, services to migrants and Roma people. Yet at the same time they face decreasing support from public authorities. Cuts in social services are short-sighted and self-defeating. Social services are an essential element of a healthy and functioning society, ensuring people can fully participate in that society and therefore need supporting for the well-being of all. If not addressed through social and health services, poverty and social exclusion will bear a human cost in terms of lost potential and well-being. This in turn impacts wider society.

Eurodiaconia understands the needs of governments to take action for budget consolidation but it should not be at the cost of the most vulnerable in our society today as it would lead to more vulnerable people tomorrow. This human cost is not only morally and spiritually unjust, but also goes against European values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity and endangers the goals of the European project of peace and social cohesion.

Instead, Eurodiaconia stresses the need for **a long-term perspective based on social investment** taking into account the cost of non-inclusion and the worsening of social cohesion into fiscal and economic policy decisions.

OUR DEMANDS – OUR HOPE

Eurodiaconia presents this declaration because we believe another way is possible and have hope for a better future where our challenges can be met. We believe Social Europe can be strengthened through reassessing our values and attitudes to our economy and society, developing policies and actions that ensure sustainable and just models of economic development and social protection. We therefore call all people, societies, national governments and the European institutions to:

1. Adopt a long term vision of the social sector and the well-being of people through investing in accessible social services and an effective social protection system
2. Acknowledge the Social Market Economy as an overarching goal guiding policy decisions where the economy is at the service of people, rather than people being at the service of the economy.
3. Reorganise the financial architecture including a fairer and more equitable taxation system, while also considering a financial transaction tax to support social protection systems and other priorities.
4. Guarantee an adequate income for all to enable a life in dignity, empowerment and full participation, therefore contributing to restore confidence in society and political processes.
5. Recognise and support the role of sustainable non-profit social services, both politically and financially, to ensure they can fulfill their mission of meeting people's needs and building social cohesion in our community.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we believe in the responsibility and solidarity of all in sharing the responsibilities in our societies. Eurodiaconia recognises the exceptional circumstances facing Europe today and wants to underline our acceptance of our co-responsibility in facing this common challenge, to ensure support for all in our society. We urge National and European political leaders to join us in accepting this co-responsibility by adopting long-term policies placing peoples' well-being and protection at the centre of all strategies, resisting financial and economic pressures to sacrifice the major part of society, especially the most vulnerable, and therefore protecting and investing in Europe's most precious resource: its people.

