Multilateralism and Methodology Project
Conference on the Future of Europe
Dublin City University

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REPORT

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CENTRE FOR RELIGION, HUMAN VALUES, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING/DUBLIN CITY INTERFAITH FORUM

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: MEETING AT THE HELIX, DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY, 24–25 FEBRUARY 2022

SUMMARY

The objective of the meeting was to develop shared thinking on a number of public issues as a contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) is an initiative of the European Union launched on Europe Day, 9 May 2021. The CoFoE is a "bottom-up" project, engaging with EU citizens and civic society through a digital platform, local meetings, citizens' panels, and other innovative approaches. The goal is to share ideas and help shape the medium-term future of the European Union. The CoFoE is due to conclude in mid-2022.

The meeting at the Helix took place on 24/25 February, bringing together members of many different churches and faith communities and other invited guests. Participants drew on the report produced after preparatory online consultations on 2nd December 2021 (https://www.dcu.ie/religionandhumanvalues). Experts on European issues made keynote presentations. Working groups addressed eight different themes. The meeting concluded with a panel discussion among the representatives of different faith communities.

This report is divided into four parts. The first part, under the heading "values and the future," reflects our discussions on today's disorientation and sense of danger in international affairs and on the other hand, the high-level values that should underpin the role of the European Union in peacebuilding. The second part summarises discussions in key policy areas – in particular, migration, housing, and the media and technology. The third part offers some preliminary thinking on the concepts and organisational principles that can encourage a mutually beneficial engagement by political leaders and other stakeholders with faith communities. The fourth part consists of recommendations, including the following:

1) public authorities should recognize that the granular provisions of the law depend on, and nurture in turn, a worldview and way of life. Therefore, the "soul of Europe" is be discovered in action, in the dialogical relationship between high-level values and practical politics
2) on the island of Ireland, we should bring to the discussion on values our experience of the Good Friday Agreement and the unfinished work of peace. We need to promote where possible a rounded understanding of security and peace based on relationships
3) "well-being frameworks," which are under consideration in both jurisdictions, can enable us to pursue key underlying values, such as equity, across different "domains". The COVID vaccination program is a useful precedent for investment in the infrastructure of society
4) on housing policy, the Conference on the Future of Europe presents us with an opportunity to learn from other Member States and also to look at wider European and global frameworks which shape the facts on the ground. We identified four key channels through which the EU can help address current challenges
5) on migration, we should support political leaders in national politics and the European institutions as they seek to develop a more consistent and ambitious strategy at a European Union and global level
6) technological development should be politically accountable and should be steered in a "human-centred" direction. Measures are needed to address threats to democratic discourse arising from the new means of communication.

NATURE OF THE EVENT

DCU's Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, in partnership with the Irish Inter-Church Meeting and the Dublin City Inter-Faith Forum, hosted an in-person meeting at DCU's Helix Theatre on 24th and 25th February to develop shared thinking on a number of public issues as a contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. The event was officially opened at 2pm on Thursday, 24th February with speeches by the President of DCU, Professor Daire Keogh, and Noelle O'Connell, CEO of the European Movement and National Citizen Representative in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Keynote presentations were made by Francis Jacobs ("Founding values of post-war Europe"); Anne Barrington ("Housing and the future of Europe"); Jane Morrice ("the Good Friday Agreement approach to EU peacebuilding") Bishop Noel Treanor ("Conference on the Future of Europe"); and on the second day, by Catherine Day ("EU and Irish migration policies").

On day two of the meeting, welcoming speeches were made by Bishop Brendan Leahy (Irish Inter-Church Meeting), Archbishop Michael Jackson, chair of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum, and Derick Wilson (Corrymeela). To conclude the meeting, Archbishop Michael Jackson chaired a panel discussion among religious representatives. The panelists were: Gillian Kingston, Vice-President, World Methodist Council; Karen Jardine, Presbyterian Church in Ireland; Ahmed Hasain, Islamic Cultural Centre; Dr. Hemant Kumar, Vedic Hindu Cultural Centre of Ireland; and Bishop Brendan Leahy.

Over the two days, working groups addressed the following themes:

1. Global challenges/World Social Summit 2025
2. Founding values of post-war Europe
3. Wellbeing indicators and an overall vision of the economy
4. Migration policies
5. Housing policy and the future of Europe
6. International security/The Good Friday Agreement approach to EU peacebuilding
7. The dialogue between faith communities and public authorities
8. The media, technology, and the future of Europe

Each working group had an appointed notetaker.

This report is based on the written and oral contributions of a wide range of participants including the appointed note takers. The conclusions reflect a broad consensus. They do not reflect, in every case, the views of every participant.

The report is divided into four parts. Part One, “Values and the Future,” covers working groups 1,2, and 6. Part Two, “Wellbeing Frameworks, Migration Policies, Housing Policy, and the Media and Technology covers working groups 3, 4, 5, and 8. Part Three, “The dialogue between faith communities and public authorities,” covers working group 7. Part Four summarises our recommendations.

A PART ONE: VALUES AND THE FUTURE (working groups 1, 2, and 6)

Global challenges

The Russian invasion of Ukraine had already begun as our meeting was getting underway. This raised profound questions for the EU's eastern neighbourhood policy, the calibration of EU foreign, security, and defence policies, and the future of global diplomacy. We were also mindful of the famine in Afghanistan, tensions in Bosnia, and wars in Yemen and elsewhere. The Conference on the Future of Europe runs *pari passu* with these developing situations. In addition, there are significant "peacetime" developments within the EU, including the recent European Court of Justice ruling on violations of the rule of law by Member States.

It has been clear for some time that a path has opened up to qualitatively new dangers at the global level. The UN Secretary–General's report of September 2021 states: "the world is experiencing its biggest shared test since the Second World War ... Humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: breakdown or breakthrough." A report released on 28 February by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that "the lives of billions of people" are being affected by "dangerous and widespread disruption in nature." The war in Ukraine is displacing millions of people and threatens to disrupt food supplies and many other aspects of global stability and cooperation. The sense of our meeting was that we need to oppose these trends with a commitment that goes in the opposite direction, a peacebuilding project with the human person, human relationships, and planetary ecology at the centre of our thinking. It is more necessary than ever for the European Union to reflect on its own values and the actions we can take to build a more socially and ecologically just world. We must not lose perspective or allow our horizons to shrink. We should give serious thought to perpetuating at least some aspects of the Conference on the Future of Europe. For example, the European Citizens' Panels could be reconvened at fixed intervals, with representation for the voices of the churches and communities of religious faith. We should connect a deeper engagement with the formative values of postwar European peacebuilding to reflections on our immediate policy objectives, our institutional architecture, and the various aspects of our wider international engagement. To the extent we are successful in this, the European Union will gain in terms of legitimacy and public understanding.

There are many similarities between the situation today and the situation post-WWII, when the first European institutions emerged. At that time our founding values had real resonance in our societies. The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the early post-war European institutions, the Helsinki Final Act, and more recently, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect a consistent vision. They presuppose the interconnectedness of issues and the need for a broad international agenda integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations. They look forward to reconciliation between former enemies and to a cultural change involving trust and enhanced agency, as well as to material objectives. Ultimately, what is at stake is our understanding of peace and peacebuilding.

"Economic alliance" or global pioneer of "a new, more inclusive and integral economic model, ecologically and environmentally future-proofed"?

There was consensus within the discussion group on international security that the EU has partly mutated into an economic alliance, which implies a certain neglect of our foundational values and perhaps even a change in what we mean when we describe the European Union as a peace project. One speaker suggested that within the EU, insufficiently regulated market forces are provoking a twin movement of the population from the East to the West and from rural to urban areas. Similarly, the measures adopted to stabilize the euro during the financial crisis appear to have contributed to greater inequality. The EU institutions and Member States should take greater cognizance of constructive commentary on issues of this kind as a prelude to international engagement. Trade policy should ultimately promote the global common good. What does "positive peace" look like in the EU and more widely? A central question is whether there is a way to support peace as greater social cohesion and not just the absence of military conflict.

The discussion group on global issues concluded that a primary role for the European Union in global peacebuilding is to set an example. Europe is now a smaller factor in world affairs than in the colonial period or at the end of WWII – it does not have the same economic power as it once had. But this can be an advantage in the global setting, enabling Europe to be a model for (a) care for one another – the common good (b) elimination of extremes in the political sphere and in society and (c) a sense of service rather than of power.

Participants noted the contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe from the Bishops of England and Wales, who – on the basis that Britain is also a part of Europe – proposed a list of priorities for the European Union including a humanitarian approach to refugee flows, an economic vision rooted in human dignity, meaningful controls on the sale of weaponry, effective provision of aid to the world's poorest communities, and an ambitious plan to protect the environment. In early December, the Brussels office of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) co-organised with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation an on-line conference on the expectations of the churches in Europe from the Conference on the Future of Europe. An important theme was the importance of listening to the voice of young people calling for a new, more inclusive and integral economic model, ecologically and environmentally future-proofed.

These various perspectives are in keeping with the vision of the early advocates of European integration, who almost all warned against two risks – Europe being seen just as a collection of economic interests and Europe being seen as a dry and bureaucratic legalistic and institutional structure. Their peace project was a process or a journey shaped by a steadily developing community of resources and values. Louise Weiss, at 86, chaired the first session of the directly elected European Parliament in 1979. She had written:

> *La convergence d'interêts économiques est nécessaire, mais non suffisante pour tisser de vrais liens entre les états européens. Sans une armature ethique et juridique, L'Europe de l'argent ne menera qu'à la faillite collective*
>
> The convergence of economic interests is necessary but insufficient to weave true connections among European States. Without an ethical and juridical framing, the Europe of money will lead to nothing other than collective failure

The Schuman Declaration (1950) was the most important of the many post-war statements of a European ideal. This Declaration states:

> *L'Europe ne se fera pas d'un coup, ni dans une construction d'ensemble: elle se fera par des réalisations concrètes créant d'abord une solidarité de fait. Le rassemblement des nations européennes exige que l'opposition séculaire de la France et de l'Allemagne soit éliminée …*
>
> Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany …

This vision of solidarity, reconciliation, and change, translated into today's terms, can inspire both the European continent and other regions of the world.

Axiomatic values, a soul for Europe, and a global civilization

Schuman, De Gasperi, and Adenauer were pre-war politicians from the Christian Democratic tradition; all were devout Catholics from border regions. Louise Weiss had a Jewish background. Altiero Spinelli, like Paul-Henri Spaak, is seen primarily as a socialist. The Kreisau Circle in Germany, many of whom gave their lives for their beliefs, brought Lutherans and Catholics together with other persons of good will. The proponents of the welfare state in Britain arean important strand in the awakening of Europe's political conscience; they were inspired in many cases by their Anglican faith. These foundational thinkers from across Europe differed on many issues. There was a significant divide between those who wished to stick to essentially intergovernmental methods and those who were prepared to move in a supranational direction. However, all these thinkers have in common a clear understanding that the higher values underpinning peace in Europe are rooted in our heritage and our humanity. Such "axiomatic" values as trust, solidarity, reconciliation, and international cooperation are antecedent in time and in logic to the modern nation State, the Common Market, and the European Union. They can be promoted through wise political decisions, especially, as Schuman said, by acts of solidarity. However, trust will not arise as a result of a "constitutive" decision within the political process. We cannot legislate for reconciliation.

The vision of the German jurist Böckenförde captures the issue clearly: the democratic state relies on conditions that it cannot itself generate or guarantee. A central, practical conclusion of our meeting is that public authorities should follow Böckenförde in recognizing that our high-level values and principles are, at least in part, "pre-political". The granular provisions of the law depend on, and nurture in turn, a worldview and way of life. The "soul of Europe" is to be discovered in action, in the dialogical relationship between high-level values and practical politics. Participants welcomed President von der Leyen's statement in her September "state of the union" address that young people must be able to shape Europe's future and that for this to happen, the European Union "needs a soul and a vision they can connect to." A "soul" – a unifying presence among all our scattered enterprises - cannot be taken as read or merely set out in documents.

Several speakers referred to the perspectives of younger people. Are they inclined to take peace for granted – or on the contrary, are they disillusioned with the prevailing narratives? A shared disposition to act in the common interest, according to common criteria, is a hard-earned achievement in any political context. It requires work at several levels, including a commitment to work towards justice through an inclusive dialogue. Policing other people's opinions is not the way to achieve harmony. Several participants drew attention to the inner disposition that will accompany a just transition in the public sphere: "change yourself, change the world."

Considerations of this kind led on to the question – raised in more than one discussion group –whether an "EU identity" will be exclusive, belonging to the Member States, or whether of its nature it will be more inclusive, embracing Europe beyond the boundaries of the EU 27. Geographically, historically, and culturally, our neighbours are part of Europe. Should we speak of "human" or "universal" values as well as "European" values? Is there a difference between "European values" and "human values"? Do we risk at some point promoting just "European" or "Western" values at the expense of something deeper? What is the place of religion in this discussion? Are some of the answers that are given to all these questions connected to the decline of faith-based societies?

In assessing today's challenges, we have to ask ourselves serious questions, perhaps even (as was suggested in the discussion group on global issues) one very searching question: where did we let it all

go? Over seven decades of relative peace since WWII, have we engaged sufficiently with the most consequential issues? Have we put in place institutions and political processes with the authority to effect solutions? Participants in the discussion group on security noted that WWII prompted new and ambitious thinking. It was accepted, in the words of the Schuman Declaration, that "the peace of the world cannot be maintained without creative efforts commensurate with the scale of the threat." What "creative efforts" can make an equivalent difference today?

One of the leading thinkers of the post-war era, Giorgio La Pira, Mayor of Florence ("*il sindaco santo*") advocated, as well as social solidarity at home, a number of political priorities to counter the emerging East-West and North-South divides of the second half of the 20th century:

- disarmament
- decolonization
- measures to counter racism
- a dialogue between different regions and faiths, East-West and North-South
- an area of peace around the Mediterranean
- a new style of Europe-Africa relations

The meeting considered that in the spirit of La Pira, the European Union should be open to a long-term dialogue about the direction of our civilization. A strategy of this kind will require a form of humility. We will need to practice patience and the politics of the next step. The re-appropriation in Europe of the higher values that underpin peacebuilding can play a primary role in the renewal of global multilateral diplomacy.

A renewed values-led European role in global diplomacy

- ***Obligation to know***

In relation to our *obligation to know*, there is more at stake than a willingness to look at evidence, important as that is. Equally important is the vantage point from which we examine the evidence. Our receptivity to other points of view is essential. The global phenomena that require close attention if we are to free ourselves from "structural bias" include, first, climate change and the destruction of the environment. The challenges of migration and rapid technological change are the subjects of separate sections of this report. Another theme of global relevance is that the defence of individual human rights requires a commensurate effort to promote the social and environmental conditions in which human rights can be enjoyed by all citizens.

- ***Understanding reconciliation***

Our working groups turned at several moments to the question of reconciliation and the distinction between peace and reconciliation. "The unfinished work of peace" is a central concern in Northern Ireland. "Peace" properly understood is much more than the absence of violence.

Ireland's experience with the Good Friday Agreement demonstrates that different cultural realities or identities can be accommodated in the same space at the same time. Some people in Northern Ireland identify as British, others as Irish, and others as British and Irish – and some people have other citizenships as well. This kind of pluralism can have a role in many other situations in Europe and the world, including perhaps Ukraine – if there is a peace agreement under which certain issues touching on identity and allegiance remain open into the future. Healing from trauma and the role of spirituality is another area in which the Irish experience can illuminate post-conflict situations elsewhere. Speakers referred to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's "Considering Grace" and Alan Falconer's "Reconciling Memories" and also to the respective narratives of Philip Morgan on the "Falklands" and Jose Miguez Bonino on the "Malvinas". In any historical situation, it is important to ask, "How is the story being told?" The decade of centenaries in Ireland illustrates the salience of this question. We should acknowledge the power of storytelling and memory-making.

Some speakers addressed issues round the imperial experience, of which Ireland was a part in more ways than one. The 20th century saw the dissolution of a number of European empires: Ottoman, Austrian, German, Russian, French, and British. To what extent does a Europe of reconciliation require us to acknowledge publicly that "we haven't always got it right"?

The European Union has shown in the past that it is possible to overcome bitterness and create a sense of belonging uniting former adversaries. It is essential to avoid a psychological disposition in which conflict ("fighting for a cause") appears to give meaning to life. To keep open the path to reconciliation, the demonization of others has to be avoided. We always need confidence-building measures: constructive relationships rarely wholly vanish even in the midst of a crisis. Religious believers know that there are realities beyond borders and "isms" and ideology. The goal is human fraternity and friendship, regionally and globally. This will require patient interaction at many different levels. Introducing the perspectives of religious believers can enhance the quality of dialogue and help draw out the best in ourselves and others.

- ***The meaning of security***

It was common ground at the meeting that a great deal depends on our understanding of the word "security". A straightforward example is that the development of cyber capabilities, and security from cyberattacks, involve new issues that go beyond military security as traditionally understood. More broadly, we can draw on the thinking of Louise Weiss and others to affirm that there is form of security that depends on relationships and *moral unity.* For such moral unity, a degree of shared economic wellbeing is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The goal is for habits and assumptions to change and for the threat of force to recede into the background. The sense of our meeting was that we need to promote where possible a rounded understanding of security and peace. "Security" according to such a paradigm is enjoyed by a political community characterised by the forward-looking quality of their shared space. Civilian and military capabilities can be tailored to a range of specific tasks.

The discussion groups highlighted key questions concerning proportionality in the allocation of effort and resources. How much does peace rely on such very different factors as non-violent political action, armaments/deterrence, shared prosperity, and the involvement of citizens? In situations of conflict, we can use Jane Morrice's distinction between peacekeepers ("hard hats"), peacemakers (political

representatives, diplomats), and peacebuilders (people, civic society) to ensure an appropriate level of investment in each sphere.

How can we on the island of Ireland use our experience of the Good Friday Agreement to support peacebuilding within the EU and by the EU? Much of the discussion turned on the concept of *organic peacebuilding*. Within the EU, each member State should be "another instrument in the orchestra," without domination by others. Peace is always an ongoing process, not a single agreement. There was strong support for the idea that peace can be promoted "from the ground up." We can aim to "minimise the distance to travel between the 'top and bottom' of society by strengthening lines of communication."

The Good Friday Agreement was shaped by the three-stranded design of the negotiating process. Might we envisage a transformative European diplomacy shaped by a multi-stranded approach? The strands could cover, for example, the future of the European Union, the future of the wider Europe, and global engagement.

The role of culture must be prioritized; culture spurs "organic peacebuilding" through network-building and relationships. The Irish experience is that we can elevate the local grassroots organisations working for peace. Similarly, international security and peace can be sustained through funding for communities. "The formal macro-contexts are sustained through strong micro-relations and relationships." The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2007) encourages EU institutions, European governments, and donor agencies to respond with a more holistic methodology to crises through the improved linking of humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and peace efforts.

It was noted that the movement of work online and the growth of dormer/commuter communities around big cities in Ireland has weakened social cohesion. The idea of the 15-minute city, an urban concept according to which most daily necessities can be accomplished by either walking or cycling from residents' homes, has been used in other EU countries. The 15-minute city can be a concrete way of promoting social cohesion at the European level.

Our discussions on security highlighted the need for activities (and funding for activities) that would be less outcome-targeted and more looking to support processes of community building. Sometimes we can frame the "target" in terms of the activity itself and not outputs as such. An example would be the "simple" funding of tea and biscuits for meetings in community centres. Increased contact between people in their immediate communities is extremely important as a measure to anticipate and prevent the growth of resentment and distrust between social groups.

It was suggested (without conclusions being drawn) that "there is wisdom in Irish neutrality." The values implicit in military neutrality include a commitment to work towards a global security community in the spirit of the UN Charter. They also include a focus on disinterested deliberation and democratic legitimacy. Attention was drawn to the position of the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in their contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe:

> … collectively European countries are the second largest supplier of arms in the world. The EU Common Position on arms export controls aims to ensure that weapons sales by Member States do not undermine international peace or human rights. While this Position in legally binding, there is currently no enforcement mechanism. We (therefore) believe the Conference on the Future of Europe should endeavour to make the current EU arms exports control mechanism more effective and deepen cooperation on this issue with neighbouring states including the UK

This statement is a reminder that the term "defence" often embraces, as well as the capabilities needed to uphold a security community, as described above, a range of other capabilities and activities deserving of greater scrutiny.

- ***Sharing***

In the words of one participant, "we don't need refined weaponry but democracy." Even in a democracy, however, negative dynamics can arise. A previously peaceful community may split into opposing camps or turn aggressively on the "other", whether internally or externally. It is widely recognised that "social friendship" should characterise personal relationships in politics. Friendship allows us to preserve unity in

the presence of differences and to disagree constructively and respectfully. This enables in turn a dialogical process in which our "worldview" helps to shape the laws and vice-versa.

Society should value all work and all people in ways that the market alone can never achieve. Companies need to be more transparent in their dealings – financially, digitally, politically and environmentally. It was also suggested that a shorter working week would give people the time to be together in friendship and would encourage and promote family life and family time and space. It could be argued that the common life of a church or faith community should model – anticipate and inspire – the common life that we try to construct at the national and international levels.

- ***Freedom and truth***

A measure of consensus is needed in any stable democracy (John Hume: "the difference between policing and martial law is consensus"). A richer understanding of the meaning of freedom is central to a culture hospitable to all points of view. As we saw during the height of the pandemic, citizens can recognise the common interest, assent freely to day-to-day decisions, and act according to a logic of solidarity, even when the law is unclear or incomplete. Good leadership inspires personal, psychological, and political maturity. The creative and responsible exercise of freedom, not mere "consumer choice," is the foundation of a society based on relationships of trust. To be enjoyed properly, freedom requires capabilities and resources. European citizens also need the education that will enable them to resist digital misinformation and "groupthink".

- ***Education for dialogue***

A future-oriented culture of encounter requires preparation. Education is critical for the development of human responsibility and conscience and for moving us towards the day where everyone will feel safe to enter discussions in the public sphere. We need to equip young people to connect their deepest values with the language of public discourse – a form of "bilinguality" or "mutual literacy."

Students should know something of the sources and roots of European civilization and the nature of civilization itself. Civilisations are not walled off from one another or self-sufficient. One test of a civilization is the ability to understand the "other", to integrate new elements, and to evolve. Education, sport activities, and common educational standards (the international Baccalaureate) present ways to encourage learning together and minimize animosity towards the perceived "other".

In our broader society, we need safe spaces for dialogue and real engagement. Encounter is more than just meeting people. It is about confronting questions and issues together. We need to expand our knowledge in policy areas such as food security, migration, climate change, transport, problems facing the family, and other formative issues. Mention was made of Erasmus exchanges for older as well as younger populations. There are options for leveraging digital advances and the social media in this strategy of cross-country exchanges and conversations. However, the consequences of relying on on-line connections for relationship-building have not yet been adequately measured.

It was suggested that the principle of subsidiarity needs to be better reflected in our methodology. Community groups are a good setting for dialogue. It is not necessarily an advantage that so many actors in the community sector are "professionalized". The pursuit of funding, including from the EU, may lead to a "disconnect" from real communities.

Inter-generational and inter-regional dialogue also need to be prioritised. Cultural exchanges should be enhanced – including between towns and rural communities and perhaps (in view of evident social disparities) between urban districts. Inter-regional engagement can become a useful part of migration policy.

The preparation for life offered by our universities should acknowledge the pluralist character of our society, the importance of all fields of learning and their inter-relationship, and the inter-relatedness of societies across the world. Universities have a critical role in facilitating frameworks for dialogue and forms of research aimed at mutual literacy across cultures and the cultivation of common ground.

- ***Faith communities***

The universal character of churches and faith communities can help transcend nationalities and cultures. They can contribute to our understanding of "great fundamental words" such as love and hope. During COVID, at the local level, faith communities have helped make people aware of the regulations and restrictions in place. Similarly, an awareness of international issues, for example in the realms of climate change, food security, and migration, are often communicated in part through faith communities and faith-based charities. We should highlight the many success stories where faith communities have helped to promote tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

It was noted that the world faiths share very similar high-level values – for example, peace, justice, love, care for creation, and human dignity. The Golden Rule is for all! It follows from this that there is no inherent contradiction between the values of faith and the guiding values of politics. There is scope for churches and faith communities to reach out to one other when they are preparing decisions or statements on ethical issues and public policy.

The participants noted that the Irish Government appears favorable to a "re-set of its relationships with churches" and that the Northern Ireland Executive has also been ready to engage positively with churches and faith communities. The experience of interaction during COVID is relevant to future relationships on both sides of the border. Churches and faith communities should call on appropriate expertise from their members in order to contribute as cogently as possible to future discussions. For their part, public authorities, including the European institutions, should foster openness to faith-inspired discourse on key issues facing society. The dialogue between religious representatives and public authorities is considered in more detail in the third section of this report.

PART TWO: WELLBEING FRAMEWORKS, MIGRATION POLICIES, HOUSING POLICY, AND THE MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY (working groups 3, 4, 5, and 8)

Wellbeing frameworks

Gambling addiction, war, car crashes, environmental disasters, and many other activities of doubtful social value contribute to GDP; whereas taking time out to care for loved ones does not. A number of jurisdictions, including Ireland and Northern Ireland, are exploring the development of "well-being frameworks" as a means of complementing the GDP metric and focusing on policy outcomes that will make our community more equal, inclusive, supportive, and secure.

The COVID pandemic has had a complex set of effects on volunteering and social relationships. Initially, COVID prompted an increase in volunteering, state engagement with voluntary organisations, and state supports for the vulnerable. Later, as COVID became a genuine pandemic, people had to limit personal contacts and became unsure of whether and how they could engage. Overall, COVID brought out a sense in society that something should and can change for the better. People want to live in communities – which implies a more equal society characterized by social solidarity, economic security for all, and a sense of place. "Well-being indicators" point in the same direction as the sustainable development goals and the fulfilment of international commitments in the realm of climate change.

The lived experiences of the participants and those they work closely with in communities and parishes suggests that "inequality of condition" remains a strong feature of Irish and wider European society and is linked in some respects with ethnic and religious differences. Some economists argue that in developed economies, a combination of monetary policy, technology-led growth, and demography (an ageing population) is contributing to a rise in inequality. Part of this dynamic is that healthcare, housing provision, and even natural amenities are "commodified". These challenging critiques of the direction of the economy were acknowledged by participants without there being time to reach conclusions.

There was a more focused discussion on the social dimensions of wellbeing than on global economic perspectives. Among the dimensions of wellbeing most highlighted were:

- having the security of a place to live
- health, including the social determinants of health
- mental health, including the phenomenon of "death by despair"
- learning and skills—one participant was shocked to see that NALA (the National Adult Literacy Alliance) has a 20-year Plan, which assumes that school education will still not guarantee literacy for all
- spirituality as a dimension of wellbeing, or as a support for overall wellbeing
- environmental sustainability

The promise of a well-being framework is that we can pursue underlying values, such as equity, across a number of "domains". The COVID vaccination program is a useful precedent for investment in the infrastructure of society understood in a broad sense. Access to services is not a "residual" issue – that is, only concerned with the needs of the most disadvantaged – but a "universal issue" concerned with structural flaws that compromise our overall vision of society. Against this background, there were some illuminating divergences within the group on priorities and policy preferences. One such divergence was between:

(a) a total emphasis now on the "climate catastrophe"; and

(b) the view that specific social problems need to be addressed and, in any case, people under economic and social pressure will not support radical action on climate change.

Another divergence was between:

(a) the argument that a Universal Basic Income could address most problems of poverty, exclusion and the complexity of means-tested welfare; and

(b) an emphasis on the need for supportive public services — tailored to the complex needs of individuals and families — which would be less affordable if the state was paying a Universal Basic Income to all, including those on high incomes.

Given many of the participants' day-to-day work in ministry, considerable attention was given to spirituality as a dimension of wellbeing and the link between spirituality and mental health. It was noted that there is a very wide spectrum of formal and informal practices through which people find and express meaning. A number of participants expressed an interest in a broad empirical sociology or anthropology of the diversity of existing practices.

Within various therapeutic and caring practices there is further scope to embrace the "spiritual" dimension of care and recovery. The participants noted that international thinking and practice in certain fields is becoming more holistic — for example, Leamy's work in the NHS and the Canadian Model of Occupational Therapy.

The churches have a significant number of immigrants and asylum seekers in their congregations. While immigration into Ireland has often worked well, the participants noted some change in attitudes in the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis of 2008-2011. Here, they underlined the critical role of housing. In the context of a widespread shortage of affordable housing, the allocation of social housing to immigrants or asylum seekers could prompt resentment and negative political tendencies. Reliance on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is not a solution. Migration and housing are discussed in more detail in the next two sections below.

Migration policies

One of the themes of the Conference on the Future of Europe is managing migration through a "predictable, balanced and reliable system." Do Ireland and the European Union have the shared values and the decision-making capacity to ensure an enlightened response in this area of policy which in terms of a "soul for Europe" is deeply important? The EU has been developing policy on legal migration – regarding, for example, the blue card and family reunification. Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) helps to control the external borders of the EU. However, despite many efforts to make a common asylum policy work and to control migration, these can probably be characterized as areas of policy which are visibly not working well. The relatively late development and still-evolving character of EU policy on migration has to some extent lowered the level of ambition. The view was expressed that it

will probably take several more years to achieve a mature policy that functions well across the whole of the EU.

Questions of asylum and illegal/unauthorized migration are politically challenging for several reasons:

- The EU's geographic location. We are seeing this most dramatically in Ukraine. But successive waves of refugees have arrived in frontline states (Italy, Spain, Greece, Malta). The Syrian crisis in 2015 raised major questions throughout the European Union and exposed a lack of real solidarity with frontline states on the part of those further away
- The stance of less prosperous Eastern European states who acceded to the European Union in 2004. These Member States did not expect to be asked to support other countries who are even poorer. In many cases they had no strong tradition of immigration
- An unsympathetic focus on migration by political leaders in Hungary and Poland (before the recent crisis) and by some political parties in France, Germany and elsewhere.

The neighbourhood of the European Union will continue to be full of refugees and migrants as a result of what is happening in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere. Millions of Syrians are still displaced. Climate change and its impact on many communities in Africa means that an ambitious EU migration strategy will be necessary far into the future. There is no avoiding the need for a common policy supported actively by all Member States. There are lessons to be learned from the solidarity shown to Ukrainian refugees in recent weeks.

The current French Presidency is trying to achieve agreement on issues such as:

- Checks and registration at external borders, as Member States decide whether to allow entry
- The appointment of an EU "returns coordinator," whose role will be to try to bring national practices closer together in relation to persons refused entry
- A new approach to relocation and solidarity. Member States could volunteer to accept relocated people – with EU funding and obligatory solidarity from non-participating countries

Overall, it was suggested that this mixture of remedies can be seen as moving towards a less open attitude to inward migration. On the other hand, a well-judged solution is in principle achievable, consonant with the recent response to the Ukrainian crisis.

Ireland has gone from being a country of emigration – the pattern for one hundred and fifty years – to being a cosmopolitan society in which more than one in eight living here were not born here. This transition has taken place over about twenty years. The changing face of our society needs to be factored into all aspects of public policy.

For planning purposes, we should distinguish between those who come here as a result of the common travel area or free movement inside the EU and on the other hand:

- third country nationals who apply for visas
- the undocumented
- asylum-seekers in direct provision

There was a pre-Christmas announcement of pathways to residency and citizenship for the undocumented. Following the Day report (September 2020), the government published a White Paper in 2021 to end Direct Provision and to establish a new "International Protection Support Service."

The churches (including smaller and evangelical churches) and other faith communities have detailed knowledge of the challenges faced by immigrants and asylum-seekers. The participants noted that as we move towards an alternative to Direct Provision, there remain issues that need to be addressed, for example the right of young asylum seekers to grants for third level education.

Religious actors are well-placed to encourage local conversations relating to migration, race, inclusion, interactions with neighbours, and related issues. This might lead, for example, to acknowledging fears and concerns around migration at the local level – while bringing forward case studies and empirical social and economic data to show that immigrants have in many instances revived local communities. It was suggested that some of the misunderstandings round migrants today mirror prejudices against travelers or misunderstandings round the Irish in England in earlier years, involving negative stereotypes. The stories of migrants and refugees need to be gathered and shared. Perhaps the Church press could promote suitable forms of journalism. Churches and faith communities can capitalise on their unique grassroots (pastoral) knowledge when engaging with public authorities. They can help counter any resentment

towards immigrants or asylum seekers if the economy turns down. We should remain conscious of the difference between doing things *with* a community rather than doing things *to* a community.

The meeting identified two main areas on which we should focus with a view to being "part of the solution" at EU level.

First, we can help to get a good debate going. Partly this is a matter of accepting UN obligations and our responsibilities under policies agreed within the EU. More than this, however, we should welcome migrants for the skills they bring and the work they do. In many EU Member States, demographic studies have shown over decades that the ratio between "working age" citizens and others will become less and less favourable unless we embrace inward migration. Beyond this, our understanding of "security" should include an understanding of why people leave their homes and of the investments and interventions that are needed to mitigate these pressures.

The will to act can be supported by the voice of citizens and civic society. Churches and faith communities play their part in collectively promoting a European "constituency" sensitive to our international obligations, the benefits of migration in the light of demographic patterns, and the needs of vulnerable and marginalised people who flee their country. We should help political leaders in national politics and the European institutions to develop a more consistent and ambitious strategy on migration as a European Union and global issue. The debate that we promote should counter narrow and nationalistic understandings of European identity. It should become axiomatic in our thought that some issues need to be addressed on a time-scale longer than the electoral cycle and on the basis of a deeper moral consensus.

Second, if we agree that the European Union "can't take in everyone," we need to reflect on the right balance between creating pathways for authorized immigration (over and above our legal obligations to provide protection to asylum-seekers) and policies aimed at strictly limiting admission and "returning" those who fail to meet the criteria. Ireland, as a country of emigration, should have more empathy than most with people on the move. Migration has to be managed – we cannot take in everyone who wants a better life – but hopefully we can build policies that deal with asylum seekers in a humane way, that offer

legal routes to economic migration, and that enable us to engage constructively with migration as a regional and global issue.

Housing policy and the future of Europe

Article 34 of the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights of the EU states that:

> In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Union law and national laws and practices.

The Conference on the Future of Europe presents us with a real opportunity to look at the wider European and global framework which makes housing either affordable for people or unaffordable.

In the larger cities of Europe, we hear about house price inflation, rent increases that can make renting two times or more as expensive as a mortgage, and the growth of a cohort of people from 18 to 39 who are staying at home with parents because they cannot afford to move away. In addition, according to some measures, homelessness has doubled in the EU in the years since 2010. A particular concern in Ireland would be any perceived or actual competition between migrants/refugees and Irish citizens for scarce housing resources. Churches and religious actors have a place in the public debate. They have a strong knowledge of the facts as a result of their work for the homeless and in some cases the disposal of church-held land for housing development. A strong perception among our participants was that in the early years of the Irish State, there was a big housing programme which was more equitable and less finance/investment-driven than housing policy today. Something has been lost. At the same time, it was common ground among participants that to make sense of the present situation is difficult. There are many voices that focus on one aspect of the issue or another. Is this crisis occurring because land is scarce? Is it the influence of Real Estate Investment Trusts? Is it a supply issue? Is it a demand issue? Are developers creaming off excessive profits? There is a variety of answers to all these questions, and the answers change depending on the interests that are articulating the problem.

In the following paragraphs we recapitulate some of the main arguments that were heard in the course of our meeting. The summary at the end of this section includes four observations on which there was an emerging consensus.

There was broad agreement that to find an adequate answer to the housing problem, we have to look at the macro picture, including the financial crash of 2010. The European Central Bank in response to that crisis began its policy of quantitative easing – or printing money to save the euro. This coincided with a period of zero inflation. As a result, there was a lot of money moving around the international system looking for a return. At the same time, many States were bankrupt and had no money to spend on infrastructure such as housing. So, Member States across the European Union invited in international capital to build housing, mostly in the build-to-rent market. International capital, seeing its opportunity, got into investing in house building. Housing became the most obvious area where there was a significant return on investment.

The unintended consequences of this policy improvisation (or "by default" policy) were to be seen only some years later. What happened to housing in many parts of the European Union was that it became commodified, an asset to be traded or exploited for profit by powerful actors in the market. Their ability to act depended in turn on the terms of their access to finance. Housing was no longer seen primarily through the lens of citizenship or human rights as an essential means by which individuals and communities realise their potential and where the state has an essential role to play in investing and ensuring balanced and sustainable communities.

There is now a growing recognition, including in this jurisdiction (the "Housing for All" policy), that the state does, in fact, have an important role to play in alleviating the housing crisis. This means giving due consideration to the "macro" picture as described above. We should recognise that macroeconomic forces drove the "by default" housing policy in many jurisdictions. If there is no recognition that these broader circumstances were relevant and as a result, no action is taken to modify the external rules, then the problem remains intractable.

The wider framework affecting the affordability of housing includes policies within the remit of both the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Eurogroup. The ECB played a key role in its quantitative easing policies over the past decade and more when cheap money coincided with zero or negative inflation and interest rates. Central Banks continue to maintain that their primary role is to ensure the stability of financial markets. But some will argue that this purpose is too narrowly framed. They will ask whether it is legitimate to absolve the financial system of the foreseeable social and political consequences of certain decisions. Alternatively, it may be argued even at a "technical" level that "long-term financial stability" is in fact threatened by the financialisation of the housing market. It is not a sufficient response to argue that the housing crisis will be solved by increased supply. The Irish experience is evidence of complexity. It is often the case that increased supply and higher house prices coincide – for example, in the period just before the crash.

A Conference on the Future of Europe event held last year in Galway asked what the European Central Bank could do to discourage the commodification and financialisation of housing. A range of possible actions was proposed. One action could be to adopt credit guidance policies with a view to discouraging bank lending for real estate speculation. Another could be to coordinate with fiscal authorities to foster real economic activity as opposed to speculation. The European Central Bank could encourage Member States to tackle the financialisation of housing as an asset by curtailing the advantages enjoyed by international real estate investment funds.

The Eurogroup continues its work on the future of the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. In addition, new budget deficit rules, following the suspension of the rules during the Covid-19 pandemic period, will be agreed this year for 2023. These new rules could allow greater flexibility to Member States to address their housing crises. Another approach, followed in many EU Member States, is to strengthen the role of municipal and local authorities so that fewer investments in housing appear on the government balance sheet.

The Council and the Member States could reintroduce informal meetings of Housing ministers to monitor housing affordability across the EU and to provide a platform for the exchange of views on tackling

homelessness and providing decent and affordable housing. Member States could make use of their regular bilateral dialogue with other Member States to explore promising practices in the sphere of housing provision.

The European Commission has a role to play by setting affordable housing as an important policy goal. Already the Commission has highlighted the importance of affordable housing in the European Semester. The European Commission could make it explicit also that state aid rules do not apply to social and affordable housing.

In early 2021, the European Parliament produced an important report on "access to decent and affordable housing for all" which, for the first time for a European institution, looks at the many European developments that have contributed to the housing crisis in Member States. The report was drafted by Dutch Green MEP Kim Van Sparrentak. Drawing on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the European Union's treaties, the report addresses the many-faceted nature of housing policy and what needs to be done to address the issues.

For example, in operative paragraph 41 the European Parliament "invites the Member States to pursue housing policies that are based on the principle of neutrality between home ownership, private rented accommodation and rented social housing; calls on the Commission to respect this principle in the European Semester; believes that the right to housing should not be narrowly defined as access to social housing, but in wider terms as the right to live in a home in peace, security and dignity; emphasises the importance of setting transparent eligibility criteria for social and publicly-funded housing to ensure equal access to housing; encourages Member States to put in place national strategies to prevent social segregation through a wider geographical distribution of social housing, available to all citizens regardless of status, gender, religion or ethnicity…" – and so on.

The report also highlights how emissions reductions and energy efficiency can be achieved through housing renovation in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal to ensure a socially just

transition to a climate-neutral economy that leaves no one behind. In this and many other respects, the European Parliament report introduces deeper human values into the dialogue on housing. The bigger picture that we need to develop if we are to turn a corner on the housing issue, includes, as well a broader awareness of the European context, a broader understanding of human rights and social justice principles as reflected in the European Union's Treaty law and the Irish Constitution. Constitutional and treaty law, not subsidiary rules, should inform our thinking when we are framing housing policies.

The housing challenge mirrors the basic structural questions which were taken up in more detail in the small-group discussions concerning, respectively, the founding values of post-war Europe and well-being indicators. At stake in all these conversations is the future of the European Union as a peace project. Peace-building rests on the building of communities. Sometimes, what is described as an "open market" is not so much a neutral "fact" as the sphere of non-transparent power relationships. With the help of the relevant professions and academic experts, we need to examine more rigorously the interaction of "for profit" and "not for profit" factors in an open economy.

We summarise our discussions on housing in what follows.

Policy introduced at European level, in response to the global financial crisis, has had unintended consequences: the financialisation of housing and house price increases. The practice of providing increased financial liquidity has been a key factor in house price inflation in many European countries and cities. The result is that affordable, quality homes are beyond the reach of significant portions of European citizens, with many young people priced out of the market, forced to live in overcrowded circumstances and/or expensive and often insecure, rented accommodation. The result of increasing house and apartment prices means that there is now a significant portion of EU citizens who "lack sufficient resources" to access secure housing. This is a real challenge for the EU. Urgent and ambitious action is needed to fulfil the promise of Article 34.

The meeting identified four key channels through which the EU can help to address this challenge:

First, at the EU level the rights of individuals to be supported in such a way that they can have a decent existence must be given greater consideration in discussions about the application of fiscal and State Aid rules which bear directly on the ability of Member States to provide such assistance

Second, there is a need to look at the regulations and incentives provided to institutional investors, and the degree to which these market interventions are creating competitive advantages vis-à-vis other actors and entities

Third, the European Central Bank should re-consider how the rising individual and social costs, both direct and indirect, of an increasingly financialised housing system may undermine long-term financial stability within the EU

Fourth, there is a need to foster greater dialogue about housing needs and what works. It is recommended that informal ministerial meetings on housing should be convened with the aim of sharing best practice on housing, planning, land and social inclusion. These ministerial meetings should be supported by regular bilateral consultations among Member States.

The Media, Technology and the Future of Europe

Participants in the meeting did not dispute the important role played in many sectors by the gathering of data, the framing and analysis of information, and the application of algorithmic systems. For example, in the sphere of healthcare such techniques can contribute to organizational reform, diagnostics, and treatment. However, there are grounds for concern as well, ranging from the military applications of new technologies to "human augmentation" to the manipulation of voters. Our discussions on 24/25 February focused on algorithmic systems that exploit personal data for political purposes. Deliberate disinformation (trolls), on–line hate speech, the collapse of the traditional business model of the "fourth estate," and dangers to the independence of the media have serious implications for democratic discourse. The group noted, by way of context, the Brexit referendum and the election of President Donald Trump. In both cases, media manipulation was evident, and its fingerprints are also evident in

certain national European elections in recent years. The increasing influence of new technologies and new media on European social and political life creates a vulnerability. The importance of sustaining a free, professional and balanced media was more apparent to the group than ever, meeting, as it was, on the first day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In what follows, we address some of the issues that arise under the headings of democracy, connectivity, culture, AI, values, and regulation. We then offer seven recommendations.

1. Democracy

The group noted that accurate news and reporting is a common good; just as housing is a common good. A free and fair media is one of the cornerstones of the European way of life. Concern was aired about:

- the prevalence of misinformation in the media ecosystem
- the power of amplification: the spread of news and opinions can be engineered and paid for
- non-transparency: data-harvesting with a view to influencing consumers and citizens is often an unstated primary purpose behind the marketing of digital devices

In addition to the above concerns, which relate to the deliberate manipulation of information, a number of other concerns were considered:

- there is evidence that social media have contributed to the emergence of simplified markers of identity in democratic societies ("echo-chambers"; polarization)
- social media may influence how we address one another (hate speech versus "right speech") and how we develop a sense of belonging
- there has been an abdication of editorial responsibility on media platforms
- we are waking up to what it means to live in a world where "nothing can be unsaid." Even in an "open" society, the demand for the positive vetting of civil servants, employees, and citizens can lead to new forms of social control
- there are conflicts of interest where political authorities depend on profit-making networks for the conduct of public business

- it does not seem reasonable that some tech company leaders are more powerful and influential than leaders of even major countries. Business leaders lack political accountability.

Participants speculated about a potential "cultural conflict" between the US and EU ways of doing things. The general view was that Europe has a better (less "wild west") approach, in terms of regulation, accountability and control.

2. Economic and social connectivity

Promising applications of "big data" in the health sphere are noted above. Other "positives" were appreciated also, including the opportunities offered to business through new technologies, allowing them to access markets that they could never access before. Participants noted the valuable role that online communication played during COVID. The emergence of online webinars and technologies like Zoom were also praised by the group, as they open up participation in group activities across space and national boundaries.

3. Social relationships/culture/wellbeing

It was noted that social media appear to have contributed to a breakdown in some human relationships in society. Also identified was the widespread reality of fear online, encompassing new and abhorrent forms of bullying, as well as a fear to express one's honestly held opinion, in an online atmosphere of "mob rule." The shrinking boundaries of privacy were lamented. The increasing "relativism" with regard to truth and values is partly attributable to new forms of media and the prevalence of new technologies.

Failure to intervene on these issues has had profound consequences for the health of EU citizens, with increased levels of stress and anxiety in evidence, a surge in people suffering from panic attacks, and other related well-being/mental health issues. In addition, the group noted a decrease in social skills and social confidence, in relation to an overreliance on online interaction.

The community "bubbles" of information, created through online immersion, mean that there are fewer opportunities for exposure to people from other backgrounds, with other views, or from other cultural contexts. This is contributing to a blinkered version of reality for some in society and feeds into political polarisation and a greater intolerance of difference.

4. AI (Artificial Intelligence)

AI (artificial intelligence) is a general-purpose technology that can be turned in different directions and is likely to change the way we live, often for the better. The volume of data in circulation is increasing exponentially, as is the use of connected devices of one kind or another. This information needs to be framed and organized, for which AI is indispensable. However, important questions arise:

- are algorithmic systems standing in for human judgment in inappropriate ways?
- is AI reshaping the distribution of wealth and power?
- are there sectors such as synthetic biology where AI may become a factor in changing what it means to be human?
- if ethical guidelines are needed, how should they come about?

Three-dimensional video games, virtual reality, augmented reality, and the "metaverse" pose a distinct set of challenges. We need to consider the impact of AI and other technologies on our skills and abilities and on our mental health. Overall, it was seen as important that society should steer the development of technology in the light of human values. We need to be able to put AI in its proper context and to protect what is distinctive about in-person communication.

5. Values and "the philosophical space"

Relying on AI may impact on our understanding of knowledge and the scope of reason. We may start to over-value practical problem-solving in a defined context as a model for decision-making, as opposed to patient moral discernment in situations that are opaque. If we move away from emotions, humanity and human values, we may become "something like robots ourselves," one person remarked. In social, political, educational, and other contexts, a new emphasis should be placed on "face-to-face" and "eyeball-to-eyeball" communication. This form of communication lost ground during COVID. After the pandemic, we see again that humanity and human relations are the most important things. "We are relational people."

The group discussed the film *Belfast* and noted its celebration of community. Film is important for European culture. Unique expressions of European life and culture on screen (TV and Cinema) need support. The "immediacy" of present culture is making us miss out on deeper things and "deeper thinking." Cited as examples were binge-watching of TV content and click-of-a-button shopping.

What was termed "the philosophical space" needed to be defended, the group agreed. Modern society praises hard work and is full of attractive options for entertainment. In the middle of working hard and deciding (to quote a British newspaper) "how to spend it," we may no longer find room in our lives for a further third space, a "philosophical" or "meditative" space. By "third space" is meant the space, neither remunerated work nor mere entertainment, in which some of our most worthwhile activities belong: parenthood and family, prayer and religious observance, political and social engagement, an interest in the responsible mass media, and the love of literature, art, and scholarship. This philosophical space should become the ballast in our lives, limiting the impact of the social media and advertising.

6. Regulation

In the big picture, we need to keep in mind that throughout history, technological development has tended to take either of two forms. To borrow terminology from Howard Rosenbrock (an engineer, writing

in the 1980s) we can distinguish the "human-centred" approach from the "technocentric" approach. Under the "human-centred" approach, technology becomes the ally of humanity and human society. Developing technology in a "human-centred" direction raises the question of political accountability and regulation. The European Union can show leadership in shaping the global regulatory environment for digital as well as for other fast-moving, investment-driven technologies. We may need to challenge the big businesses that are running the platforms to start designing these systems in a way that promotes human dignity and human development, rather than damaging both.

The group identified seven spheres in which the EU can help to address the dangers posed by technology to democratic discourse:

First, the plurality of media should be safe-guarded, with legislation against monopolies; protecting the media is a common good

Second, accountability in relation to online comment and content was seen by the group as being vital. Identity verification for online accounts might be the way to go, as happens when we obtain a traceable mobile phone or acquire a passport or other forms of ID

Third, while propaganda and misinformation have been around for a long time, the new media technologies open the door to qualitatively new dangers. We need fresh research in this area and consideration of what a European digital public sphere would entail

Fourth, education is clearly part of the solution. it was strongly suggested by some members of the group that "media literacy" needs to be on the core curriculum of schools. There should be national strategies to overcome the "digital divide" across the EU, aimed at the elderly and citizens with less resources and education

Fifth, "virtual reality" content should be closely monitored and classified (age classification)

Sixth, our personal data should be protected. Participants recognized the importance of gathering data for some public purposes, for example in support of the healthcare system. At the same time, the group called for greater regulation of big data and tech companies that monetise our personal information

Seventh, big tech companies and tech billionaires need to be taxed for fairness. This wealth needs to be redistributed for the common good.

PART THREE: THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHURCHES AND FAITH COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES (working group 7)

Freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are core human rights principles which imply a public sphere open to contributions from churches and faith communities. Churches and faith communities can play a valuable role as agents for social cohesion as political discourse becomes more fractured globally. The world faiths share very similar high-level values – for example, peace, justice, love, care for creation, and human dignity. For their part, public authorities should recognize – as we discuss above – that there are values and principles that are "pre-political".

The view of participants was that churches, faith communities, and inter-faith fora should play an increasingly significant role in the dialogue on public issues. For very many people, faith provides deep values and shapes a way of life. This is an important resource. It can help our societies to stay in touch with and promote values such as mercy, forgiveness, and hope. Within the European Union, the juridical framework under which religions play a part in the public sphere is shaped in part by Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It was suggested that we consider communicating our recommendations to the European institutions as well as uploading them to the website of the Conference on the Future of Europe. For example, the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs would have the resources to develop an initiative under Article 17.

Historically, cooperation between policy makers, other stakeholders, and religious actors has been a sensitive issue. Religion, or a worldview with 'religious' characteristics, can serve as a marker of political identity; as a means of removing some issues from the realm of critical scrutiny; or as a reason for exclusion and an obstacle to integrating people and ideas. Therefore, we need to think carefully about the language, approach and mechanisms to get everybody around the same table and working together. At the opening of the Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations in April 2021, the Taoiseach stated:

> There is important work to be done on the concepts and organisational principles that can encourage a mutually beneficial engagement by political leaders and other stakeholders with religious actors.

As a first step, there is a responsibility on all sides to develop "mutual literacy." Religious actors need to appreciate the distinctive responsibilities of public authorities. Also important is to recognize the mistakes of the past – such as "theocratic" approaches to political engagement and the well–documented abuses within institutions which relate to a lack of accountability. Pope Francis' "synodality" process is one of many avenues opening to new thinking. On their side, public authorities should be mindful that the democratic state relies on conditions that it cannot itself generate or guarantee (the Böckenförde dictum, as discussed above).

"Principled distance" is a concept that has been developed to help shape the interaction of public authorities with faith communities in secular, pluralist societies. For public authorities, "principled distance" implies that they engage with religious communities on the assumption that all sides want to strengthen the common good. Applying "principled distance," the state understands the religious landscape and adopts a flexible approach in its conversations with religious actors. It impartially encourages all religions and philosophies that are committed to acting as responsible agents within a pluralist society in support of the common good.

For religious communities, "principled distance" raises basic questions concerning the responsibilities of political authorities. Do we agree that well-designed frameworks of engagement that enhance our common "agency" should have the support of religious actors? At the European level, do we agree, from a religious perspective, that regional problems require institutions or processes with the scale, expertise, and authority to effect solutions?

Several important parameters are implicit in an approach based on principled distance. First, the churches and faith communities have a specific identity within civic society and should not disappear from view within broader categories such as "NGOs". Second, "open, transparent and regular dialogue" (Article 17, TFEU) should address the broad concerns and major societal challenges that are the shared concern of public authorities, religions, and philosophical associations. Third, an effective dialogue presupposes a degree of coherence and prior organization within and among the religious communities that take part in

the dialogue. The churches and religions can use the moment creatively by starting new discussions or initiatives. Fourth, pluralism within and among societies is inevitable and is potentially a rich resource.

Churches and faith communities, political structures, and their inter-relationships vary enormously across the European Union. Different approaches arise out of differences in historical, cultural, social, and political circumstances. It is difficult to generalize when it comes to precise recommendations. In this perspective, there may be scope to make use of academic or diplomatic networks to help conduct a mapping exercise, assembling relevant information and examples of good practice – much as the member States of the European Union have been active during the pandemic in exchanging information on health policy.

PART FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS

The "soul of Europe" is to be discovered in action

The sense of our meeting was that we need to oppose today's disorientation and sense of danger in international affairs with a commitment that goes in the opposite direction. It is more necessary than ever for all European citizens to reflect on our deepest values and the actions we can take to build a more socially and ecologically just world in which we see or "image" peace as the rightful possession of the human community as a whole. We must not lose perspective or allow our horizons to shrink. The future of the European Union will partly depend on our becoming "part of the solution" in this way.

A central, practical conclusion of our meeting is that public authorities should recognize that the granular provisions of the law depend on, and nurture in turn, a worldview and way of life. The "soul of Europe" is to be discovered in action, in the dialogical relationship between high-level values and practical politics.

We favour the continuation into the future of citizens' panels and other formats for dialogue developed within the Conference on the Future of Europe. In this context we look forward to a deeper dialogue within the framework of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Security/peace

On the island of Ireland, we should be prepared to draw lessons on peacebuilding from our experience of the Good Friday Agreement. In this perspective, the meeting highlighted – among many other ideas - questions concerning long-term reconciliation and proportionality in the allocation of effort and resources. The meeting was favourable to the concept of *organic peacebuilding*. It was observed that the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises profound questions for the calibration of EU foreign, security, and defence policies. At the same time, the meeting noted that Ireland's military neutrality embodies values such as a commitment to work towards a global security community in the spirit of the UN Charter, a

focus on disinterested deliberation, and a recognition that the term “defence” embraces a wide range of capabilities and practices that deserve to be examined case-by-case. We should not call into question the original character of the European Union as the world’s leading peace project post-WWII.

Wellbeing

The meeting welcomed the fact that a number of jurisdictions, including Ireland and Northern Ireland, are exploring the development of “well-being frameworks” as a means of complementing the GDP metric and focusing on policy outcomes that will make our communities more equal, inclusive, and supportive. Society should value all work and all people in ways that the market alone can never achieve.

Migration

On migration, the churches and faith communities can help political leaders in national politics and the European institutions to develop a more consistent and ambitious strategy on migration as a European Union and global issue. We should face up to UN obligations and acknowledge that our society needs migrants for the skills they bring and the work that they do. The debate that we promote should encourage humane policies and act as a counter to narrow and nationalistic understandings of European identity.

Housing

On housing, the meeting considered that the Conference on the Future of Europe presents us with a real opportunity to look at the wider European and global frameworks which shape the facts on the ground, including strategies based on public investment in social housing. We identified four key channels through which the EU can help to address this challenge (see Part Three above).

The media and technology

Participants in the meeting did not dispute the important role played in many sectors by the gathering of data and the application of algorithmic systems to the analysis of information. However, technology can be turned in different directions. There are grounds for vigilance. The European Union can show leadership in shaping the global regulatory environment for digital as well as for other fast-moving, investment-driven technologies. We should steer technological development in a "human-centred" direction. The EU should take specific actions to address the dangers posed to democratic discourse by the new means of communication (see Part Three above for detailed suggestions).

Churches and faith communities

The view of participants was that churches, faith communities, and inter-faith fora should play an increasingly significant role in the dialogue on public issues. Our report offers ideas on the concepts and organisational principles that can encourage "mutual literacy" and mutually beneficial engagement by political leaders and other stakeholders with religious actors.

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