

The European Union is at the beginning of a new legislative term. Voters elected a new Parliament in June 2024, the new Commission is about to start its work. Meanwhile, the international order is in a state of upheaval and the EU finds itself in the midst of geopolitical polarisation. Under these circumstances, the EU must take decisive action to strengthen its position as a just peace broker to act in favour of a rule-based international order.

As joint voice of European Christian lay associations, we are committed to the Catholic social ethics and to reconciliation and peace. We are against playing diplomatic and military means off against each other. Both elements are not alternatives, but two halves of one strategy. In addition to military capability, the EU has to minimise confrontations through civil conflict management and multilateral negotiations. We appreciate the contribution of civil society, especially the role of women, to conflict resolution and peace.

A deeper Europeanisation of defence policy

In this legislative period, the EU must go beyond the approach of the 'Strategic Compass' that we see as a first step. **We call for a deeper Europeanisation of defence policy and permanent support for joint procurement by the Member States, which is currently limited until 2026.** Joint procurement promotes interoperability. The Commissioner for Defence is to play a key role in these tasks. The development of these new structures should be subject to effective parliamentary control by the European Parliament.

We fully support the solidarity mechanism of NATO, recognize that 22 EU member states and the United Kingdom are bound by this treaty and we clearly oppose any attempts to weaken it. We underline that we appeal for a limited EU military capacity as the European Pillar in NATO to be built step by step. We call for the EU to be not only an economic and political, but also a Security Union.

Defending our values against Russian aggression

The displacement of people within Ukraine since Russia attacked in 2014 and the military escalation driven by Russia in the course of the massive attack in violation of international law since February 2022 have caused immeasurable suffering. Also before, Russia has engaged and escalated wars like in Syria, which have made millions of innocent people flee their homes and seek shelter in Europe, as guaranteed by the international Charter of Human Rights. Ukraine and its people must not be abandoned in the short or long term. In Ukraine, European freedom, democracy and human rights are defended. We want a just peace, but not at the price of freedom, democracy and human rights.¹ The EU has to ensure in close transatlantic alliance and with its partners, that Ukraine and other endangered states withstand the attacks and restore their territorial integrity. **Ukraine deserves a just and lasting peace based on the principles of international law, in particular the UN Charter, respecting its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.** Russia must neither win the war nor start another one. This is the geopolitical priority of this decade. So called peace proposals and compromises must not be at the expense of a country, which is the victim of military aggression. Permanent support for Ukraine as well as a unified foreign policy of the EU member states are challenging, but indispensable.

¹ In February 2023, IXE issued a text stating that "we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people in their fight against aggression and in their right to live in a free country, and we recognize their right to self-defence. We condemn Russia's war of aggression as a crime against humanity." [Source: "The anniversary of the Russian war against Ukraine: Yearning for a just and lasting Peace in Europe"; 25 February 2023].

It is anything but easy to find a clear and common attitude in foreign affairs, as the internal EU struggle for the adoption and enforcement of sanctions proves. When Europe lacks unity on security issues, it paves the way for military autocratic aggression. Therefore, we are in favour of the introduction of qualified majority decisions in the Foreign Affairs Council and call on the European Council to gradually introduce these by utilising the passerelle clauses. **As a first step, qualified majority should be applied when it comes to sanctions.** In addition, the European Parliament should have a stronger voice addressing the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In the long term, we need a new peace and security architecture in which deterrence, arms control, coexistence and cooperation are well-balanced.

More strategic independence for Europe

We state our support for reducing EU strategic dependence while preserving its firm stance on human rights promotion. After a debate on European strategic dependence on China, which must be reduced from our point of view, a joint strategy should be developed. The EU itself must stand up for its common economic interest and human rights, as we are weaker, when we are divided.

The ecological crisis threatens us all. As promoted by the Green Deal, decarbonisation leads to **independence from fossil fuels**, reduces fatal energy dependencies, and increases security by drying up one crucial financial source of certain autocratic systems. **We argue that it is therefore not least an important geopolitical instrument.** To be successful, an ambitious climate policy must be strongly linked with poverty reduction and take into account the international competitiveness. A fair carbon taxation also of imports is essential to compensate for short-term disadvantages.

Standing up for truth

While nationalism and autocracies are emerging and shaking the democracies, Europe must remain steadfast and take effective measures against disinformation as one of the most erosive elements. Populists only raise problems, at times even invent them – they never solve problems. **We are in favour of a strong Europe that is able to act in a global alliance of democracies.** As Christians, we will oppose where human dignity comes under attack and we will remain committed to the struggle for the common good.

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The Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE) is an association of lay organizations and committed Christians from different European countries. General concern of IXE is to incorporate a more vivid awareness of a united Europe in the national debates. The initiative aims at fostering the encounter of Christians in Europe and to promote the Social Doctrine of the Church in order to achieve a better mutual knowledge and understanding of historical and cultural differences. Read more on <https://christiansforeurope.com/>.