



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE
European Affairs Working Group

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL FORUM ON EUROPE

The European Union's relationship with Russia will almost certainly be the greatest challenge facing Europe in the course of the next fifty years, with the possible exception of climate change. A good relationship with the Russian Federation will determine the security of our eastern border, and of those states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, especially in the Balkans and the Black Sea region. There is much unfinished history here, reaching far back into the cultural tensions between Byzantine and Latin Europe, as the Serbo-Croatian conflict has reminded us. The Union's efforts to contribute to international security, particularly in the Balkans, are greatly to be encouraged, as also its emergence as an international peace-maker, available to the UN for tangible and critical support, is of profound importance. Turkey is in a different sense part of that same history, with its complex status as half in and half out of Europe.

Economically, the relationship with the Russian Federation must increase as the Federation becomes more prosperous. European dependence on Russian energy, with all its potential and its dangers, is one aspect of this tangled and inevitable relationship. Secure economic relations with the Federation also reduce European dependence on the Middle East, which must be a long-term concern. A key to successful relations with Russia is the non-military nature of the Union, which should help to allay Russian anxiety about military threat. The fact that NATO has no clear role since the end of the cold war is another aspect of this unresolved relationship between eastern and western Europe.

The relationship with Turkey has to have far-reaching implications for European relations with the middle-east and the Islamic world beyond. A prosperous and democratic Turkey is a prize worth striving for. Indeed, the possibility of excluding Turkey could have deleterious consequences that would far outweigh the balance of the benefits of Turkey's inclusion. If the Ukraine, Georgia and perhaps Armenia eventually join the Union, or form close links with it, then the Black Sea will become a European lake! Constantine had good reasons to found Constantinople, and these reasons persist. The very prospect of membership for Turkey has been and could be a powerful incentive to positive political, humanitarian and social reform, more so than the kind of relationship implied by the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The role of civil society, 'Europe of the regions' and the politics of consensus all point to interesting possibilities for the conduct of global politics, and have the capacity to act as a model for other regional arrangements, the African Union being the most obvious example. Europe continues to be deeply involved in the affairs of sub-Saharan Africa. Here the

historical, cultural and religious links are no less important than economic relationships. It is likely that the western part of the EU in particular will continue to shape the future of sub-Saharan Africa. In a somewhat analogous post-colonial sense, Europe will continue to have an important role in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world, particularly on the South American continent.

It is hard to see any fundamental change occurring in EU relations with the north Atlantic area. A question now being posed is whether or not a genuine Atlantic partnership is to be sought- built upon new or revised institutions, or whether the EU and the USA will drift into complementary but distinct global players with intensifying competition. China and India are likely to be more closely bound up with European trade and more generally with Europe's geopolitical status.

It is good to see that there has been a burgeoning of concern about climate change of late, with public opinion more engaged with the issue than previously. This is an area in which the Union is an indispensable agent for achieving co-operation. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the policies that are required if the environment is to be preserved (and their enforcement) could be agreed and executed without the powers vested in the Commission and the other agencies of the Union.

In conclusion, we are convinced that the Union will continue to impact powerfully on Ireland, economically, politically and culturally. As the impact of immigration works itself into the life of Irish society, older moulds will inevitably mutate, and the historic North-South issue will recede in importance. But the construction and defence of an open civil society, rooted in law and democratic institutions can never be presumed. They are never given. In a dangerous and unstable world the European Union must remain not only as a bastion of civilised political discourse, but also as a beacon of hope and aspiration on the planet.