

TOWARDS THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Caritas Europa discussed priorities at the French Permanent Representation in Brussels

Pressinfo Caritas Europa. Brussels, 17 April 2008. – Caritas Europa is creating the basis for a fruitful collaboration with the forthcoming French EU Presidency. In a series of meetings at the French Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, a delegation of Caritas Europa presented its main advocacy positions to the advisory team of Ambassador Pierre Sellaal.

“In general, the gatherings were held in a very friendly atmosphere”, said Marius Wanders, Secretary General of Caritas Europa. He added: “The positions presented by our delegation reflect the current concerns of Caritas Europa and its member organisations and highlight the common core of our different policy areas aiming at bringing human dignity to the heart of the European debate”.

Caritas Europa took the opportunity of the exchange on social policy to comment on the guidance note of the European Commission for preparing National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSRs) 2008-2010. For the organisation, efforts should be made by Member States to involve a broader range of civil society actors as well as to ensure a regional and local balance at all stages of the process. As for the thematic aspects, Caritas Europa and its French interlocutor agreed on the importance to maintain a focus on child poverty. According to Caritas Europa, some peer reviews and a future communication by the European Commission, specifically dealing with child poverty, would be an important step forward in this priority area. A survey currently conducted by Secours Catholique-Caritas France is scheduled for November of this year. The publication, which is based on true testimonies of families and children collected in France, will be launched during the French EU Presidency. This offers a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the subject.

In the area of migration, the French representative expressed the wish to see adopted under their presidency the framework directive on labour migration to be followed by specific instruments on highly-skilled and on seasonal workers. For Caritas Europa, the EU needs to develop an efficient and effective labour migration policy protecting the rights of all migrant workers. This requires a flexible approach that takes into account the demand on the EU labour market for a qualified as well as unqualified labour force. Talks also addressed the EU policy on irregular migration including the proposal for a “directive on common standards and procedures for returning illegally staying third country nationals”. Caritas Europa underlined the risks linked to the compromise envisaged for the vote in the European Parliament and eventually in the Council. In particular, the organisation is worried about the possibility of allowing Member States to keep people detained for up to 18 months pending their forced removal from the territory and the proposal of applying a re-entry ban of five years following the execution of an expulsion. Caritas Europa urges Member States to use detention pending return only as last resort and in those cases to keep the holding period as short as possible.

With regard to aid effectiveness and co-financing for development, the organisation presented the joint report with CIDSE: “The EU’s Footprint in the South”, as well as the conclusions of a seminar held with CIDSE last November in Arusha (Tanzania) on the theme: “Changing dynamics and strategies in cooperation and partnership for sustainable funding between local actors in the field of development”. The delegation stressed the importance to secure the civil society’s participation in the development processes and policies in the North and in the South. The challenges set by budget support to local partners and the importance to maintain a broad understanding of ownership, were also highlighted. For Caritas Europa, ownership should be understood as ‘national ownership’ going beyond ‘government’s ownership’. These points were well received by the Permanent Representation.

The briefing paper handed over to the French Permanent Representation and containing further details about the advocacy positions of Caritas Europa is available on <http://www.caritas-europa.org>