



**Manifesto of the
Semaines sociales de France**

**What kind of Europe
do we want ?**



**Semaines
Sociales
de France**

The Semaines sociales de France ended 2017, after a year of work on Europe, with its annual session which brought together 1 600 demanding and receptive attendees and was enriched by the diversity and quality of the speakers. At a time when the Church in France proposes that Christians engage for Europe and where the citizen consultations that could prepare for an overhaul are announced, the Semaines sociales intend to share and submit to the debate, the result of this year's work, the reflections by the regional offices, the reactions received on their participatory site and the two days of the session, in a manifesto which will be enriched by exchanges with European partner associations. It presents an analysis and an open vision to more precise questions and new proposals that the democratic debate will not fail to provoke. The final version will be produced in June.

What kind of Europe do we want ?

The analysis presented during the Session debates showed that the relevant political space to deal with the challenges we face could not be addressed by the nation alone, and that the defense of our sovereignty meant sharing some of its components at the level of the European Union.

Thus, the rapid change to a globalized economy, the size of the actors, their rate of growth, no longer allow effective national responses. In a horizon of thirty years, no European country will be a member of the G8. These transformations destabilize the tools for regulation and weaken social cohesion by the explosion of inequalities between individuals and territories. In the same way, global demographic imbalances, which lead to dramatic tensions, conflicts and temptation to lapse into national identities in Europe, cannot be the subject of relevant analysis and effective policies at the national level alone. Defence and the importance of the European component has also become a priority. Ecological transition presupposes a planetary response that can only be constructed and applied around continental choices.

These truths clash with the high level of refusal of Europe, the scepticism that it brings and the lack of understanding of its relevance, of its effectiveness. It also opposes the shortcomings and current deviations of the European Union.

While European integration focused on the free exchange of goods, services and people no longer carries a mobilizing vision, the transition to more Europe is confronted with wide and destructive movements, as BREXIT, as well as the populist and anti-European push in many of the founding states and more recent members. Our diversity, before being our wealth, appears to carry a heterogeneity of visions that make it difficult to project into a common future.

The Semaines sociales measured the resistance of our common cultural foundations to all technological standardization, their capacity to nurture a shared vision. They revisited the intuitions of the founding fathers, not to take them as a model, but to recall the extent of the challenges they dared to meet and thus show the possibility for a new impetus. They emphasized the spiritual dimension of political choices, as the call by Pope Francis for European responsibility in the world. Functional and utilitarian reasons cannot be enough to promote Europe; the values that the re-foundation of Europe should carry must be put back into the heart of the political debate.

Europe in everyday life appears paradoxical: foremost in its strategy for the economic actors, it remains little and poorly known to many citizens and it is for some, especially young people, an "obvious" space, but they do not perceive its fragility. Rebuilding the European project therefore implies - after recalling the need and the aims - updating the analysis of the challenges to prioritize its objectives and to promote them.

- Shared symbols can contribute to this appropriation: thus, a holiday common to the countries of Europe, a European feast-day that could (in France, instead of May 8), commemorate the end of the war.
- Present in our daily lives, Europe must be more visible, better relayed by the politicians and the media, better taught. We support all efforts for training and information, such as those of the "Notre Europe" Academy, created by the Jacques Delors Institute.
- The teaching of current affairs to all young people from European countries will accompany, with increased resources, the extension of programs supported by Europe, such as the Erasmus program.
- The exchanges by twinning, besides the public authorities, should be extended to the associative sphere.

Reinventing solidarity: by using new tools, give the EU fiscal, legal and budgetary means to impose rules of conduct for all actors, national, European and global. This would make it possible to support and finance it, in an economy where the wage rapport is not the only model for participation in the common work.

- We need to establish convergent and equitable tax bases and encourage the fight against tax havens, including within the Union.
- The European common statement of Social Rights of Workers, proclaimed in Goteborg in November 2017, sets out principles and rights to combat social dumping (safe employment, fair wages, protection of occupational safety and health, etc.). Concrete measures must be implemented quickly, especially for the self-employed.

Affirming the dignity of man: is also to provide the means for a shared, sustainable, long-term policy of welcoming and integrating migrants. We can see today the tension between free internal movement and common migration policy, one which implies the other. It is urgent to think and organize not only asylum, but all migratory exchanges on a European scale from the point of view of a shared common good with our global partners, particularly the African ones, considering the needs of one another.

- Europe must see immigration as a positive reality, ensure the convergence of asylum processes, help migrants to understand and respect the values of host countries to ensure their integration.
- In a Euro-African political partnership, Europe must have the means to conceive and promote a shared vision of development issues, human, economic, social, environmental and democratic.

Defending the common good: is firstly to name it jointly, to designate the individual dynamics that attack it and then appropriate the means to defend it. Peace is a global common good, this vision must inspire a European policy of defense and security.

- We must build a common European defense capability, based on convergent analysis of international realities and on a coherent and active joint diplomatic action.

The planet needs a global response: but only a proposal made at European level, involving impossibilities for offenders to act in Europe, can create a global movement.

- We must create common production and consumer standards and take into account the cost of externalization by using shared tools.

Subsidiarity: the effectiveness of the Union supposes that it brings together strong nations concerned with their cohesion, respecting a necessary and effective subsidiarity. This subsidiarity defines and gives life to the political space (European, national or regional) relevant to making any decision. More respected, it allows citizens to take ownership of the European project, in a truly democratic process.

To give a soul to Europe: is not only to evoke roots that would differentiate it, it is to give it shared symbols, it is above all to profess a choice, that of the dignity of the person and his capacity to accept the other despite his difference. This choice carries a vision that can bring us together; it involves participating in the debate on the judiciary body that structures our democracy.

Having reiterated and clearly defended these principles - because they are not commonly shared - it is necessary to end with the **democratic requirement**, essential to moving forward. It involves a change in political communication, at least in France, to obtain two changes: real transparency on French positions in decision-making places, then an appropriation of European political decisions by our governments. Democracy implies a direct encounter between the actors so that they learn to know and esteem each other. It is therefore necessary to promote places and tools of shared commitments, European federations of social, environmental, educational and cultural movements.

- Transnational lists in the elections to the European Parliament would be a good tool for a lively transnational political debate.
- MEPs must be close to their constituents and devote themselves fully to their European mandate.

Democracy also comes about by integrating participatory tools to the public debate that complements the electoral mechanisms.

In the title of the session we dared to ask: "What kind of Europe do we want? We keep this duty of ownership of the European project.

Proposals of the SSF community for the Europe of tomorrow

So-called symbolic proposals

In effect, to make the European Union, it is necessary that "we" (note the importance of the "we") know and recognize each other better. Many speakers emphasized this point. That we recognize ourselves both in our diversity and in what connects us. We are not just statistics, GDP, debt and growth rates. We are people, faces.

- European Councils should not only be held in Brussels, but successively in all capitals, as was done before 2004. We are invited to refrain from saying "Brussels" to talk about Europe, we should get rid of this figure of speech. The capital of Europe is the capitals of the Member States.
- We call for the current affairs of all European countries to be taught as well as specifically European ones giving young people a better knowledge of this reality, without fear of tackling a politically divisive issue, by confronting memories and history. The round-table of the young people evoked this a lot. From lack of knowledge, mistrust arises. When will a common manual be produced for all countries?
- We propose that the Erasmus program be extended to all young people from 18 to 25 years (not just students): 6 months spent in another European country, rewarded by a diploma recognizing this training. We advocate a more proactive and efficient apprenticeship of European languages.
- We believe that twinning exchanges of towns, communities, but also associations and organizations, can play a fundamental role in mutual knowledge, paying particular attention to the countries of Eastern Europe. Here again the testimonies of the young people and the Taizé experience proves this. Also, that which the Semaines social lives through the IXE network.
- We propose a common European public holiday, May 9th, for example.

Proposals for a more democratic Europe

The European Union is involved in a multitude of spheres. Its abundant activity becomes unclear and appears as fiddly, especially when national geniuses add to it! It ought to communicate on priority objectives, in a clear language, understandable by all.

- We invite national politicians and the media to give a fair and educational presentation of Europe's contribution to the daily life of French citizens, for certain infrastructures, for example, or in the field of social assistance.
- We invite the national political groups, who have responsibility for compiling lists in the European elections, to renew the application processes, and to propose people who are really determined to carry their project for Europe, to fully dedicate themselves and report on their commitment to voters.

- The time is favorable for us to propose, for the European elections, transnational lists which would develop their political conception of the future of the EU, reflecting the major political sensitivities (right, left, liberals, ecologists ...). Initially, as an experimentation before generalizing the process, the seats released by Great Britain could be attributed to them.
- Inspired by the work already done by the Maisons de l'Europe, we invite associations and civic society to make greater use of these forums for discussion and proposals. We hope that they could become "houses of the European citizen", where the parliamentarians would hold clinics, where citizens would find answers to the questions on the functioning of Europe "on a daily basis" and where existing petition rights would be made more effective.

Proposals for a more cohesive Europe

Within the Union, the renovation of a framework for a common economic, social and environmental area is essential, to rediscover the intuitions of the social market economy.

- We ask the social partners, bosses and trade unions, in France as well as at a European level, to update the European Charter for the Social Rights of Workers, this common base of rights was built in the 1990s. They would thus give a concrete follow-up to the very general orientations of the Goteborg summit, by reviving the social dialogue and launching a new European legislative program, aimed at combating the "so-called least social". It would be good to focus on a few priorities: minimum hours of work (elimination of mini-jobs), minimum protection for workers not covered by collective agreements and to develop rights for self-employed workers.
- A Europe of solidarity is also a Europe in which national public budgets are no longer deprived of resources that are deliberately "evaded" due to tax competition between states. We welcome the initiatives of the Commission and the States to establish a basis of equitable contributions where all companies pay the tax commensurate with the benefits they derive from the European internal market. We encourage the fight against tax havens including those within the Union. We call on the "spirit of loyalty" of companies to work together to put in place effective and fair tax rules.

Outside of the Union, a European Union, that is attentive to geopolitical developments, is aware of new poles of power and wealth in the world, which do not necessarily share its values, is lucid about its demographic reality, must ensure its responsibilities towards other continents, especially those most threatened.

- We call for the construction of a common European defense capability, based on a convergent analysis of international realities. Europe must become a more coherent and active diplomatic bloc.
- We call for the reinforcement of research and innovation policies so that Europe remains an important player in the face of the technological and scientific challenges of tomorrow.

- Let us not to betray our duty to hospitality. Europe should see the current migratory trends not as circumstantial but as a given, by not sticking only to the question of refugees, but also facing that of migrants. It must consider reasonable immigration as a positive reality. It must organize strong cooperation for border surveillance; it must ensure the reception of persons entitled to international protection, by using common procedures for granting asylum, integration or the return to originating countries. It must help migrants to understand and respect the values of host countries. The dispatching of persons between member States must take into account, besides the economic criteria of the countries, the capacities and wishes of migrants as well as the history and culture of each country. Europe must not put a stop to re-uniting families.
- We call for the rebuilding of a Euro-African political partnership aimed at defining a common understanding of long-term migratory exchanges and a shared vision of the challenges of human and environmental development. On three conditions: that all the Member States be involved in such a partnership which must include economic and political cooperation to reinforce the rule of law and democracy that investing in Africa (not just for trade) is at the heart of this partnership and finally that European companies pay taxes in African countries corresponding to the benefits they derive from them.
- We call for the reinforcement of research and innovation policies so that Europe remains an important player in the face of the technological and scientific challenges of tomorrow.

Proposals for a new European humanism

Upon receiving the Charlemagne Prize in 2016, Pope Francis called for updating the idea of Europe by laying the foundations for a new European humanism, regretting the disappearance of a Europe "champion of human rights, democracy and freedom".

- Europe cannot be content to celebrate its roots and its past, but must live and embody them, in order to play a major role, in a profoundly changing world, not only by its economic or military weight but, to use the words of the Pope, by the affirmation of a community of values, an identity that has always been dynamic and multicultural. What are these values? The search for peace and justice, the choice of dialogue rather than confrontation, democracy, equality between men and women, the rejection of the death penalty, the importance of culture, freedom of the press and especially religious freedom - that of believing or not believing - and a secularism that does not relegate religions to the sole private life of believers but allows them to contribute to the construction of a more fraternal society. Just as states must report on their compliance to budgetary rules, why not impose the same exercise on them for the respect of the rule of law. The European Union is the only space in the world which imposes on all its members the respect of these rules.

- Europe must be committed to preserving the dignity of people, of all people, especially the most vulnerable, to "consider" them. "The greatest contribution Christians can make to today's Europe is to recall that it is not a set of numbers or institutions, but that it is made up of people" said Pope Francis. In the same vein, Europe must aim for the common good, the awareness of our belonging to a "community". The SSF hopes that this double attention will guide the decisions and the arbitrations of the European Union, as much in the economic and social domains, as in matters of international or environmental policy, or the scientific, biomedical and technological evolutions that our humanity faces.

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The Semaines sociales de France

The **Semaines sociales de France** offers a platform for training, debate and proposals on the major issues of society. They are nourished by and contribute to the construction of Christian social thinking, based on academic research and current affairs.

They organize an **annual session**, open to all, which is assigned to a relevant subject within our society: Europe in 2004, work in 2013, technoscience in 2014, religions and cultures in 2015, education in 2016 and Europe in 2017. These sessions promote a positive deliberation of ideas and on humanity in order to build a society based on the common good. The Semaines sociales de France work in strict autonomy with regards to the authorities and institutions.

The Semaines sociales de France also have a network of **regional branches**. Independent gatherings for discussion around the social thought of the Church, they participate in the intellectual preparation of the annual session. Each branch is called upon to organize activities at a local level to feed discussions relative to the theme of the annual session. Currently, the regional network of SSF is made up of 23 antennae distributed throughout France.

Since the 1990s, the Semaines sociales de France and several organizations of social Catholicism in Europe have come together to reflect and debate on the themes of society, based on the social thought of the Church and the European context. These exchanges led to the creation of a "European Working Group", which later became **Christian Initiatives for Europe (IXE)**. Through this network, Semaines sociales de France and their foreign partners work together to respond to controversial European decisions or initiatives.

Since their creation, the Semaines sociales de France have influenced the social and political life of our country. They have inspired many legal provisions - the 1% dedicated to social housing, the family supplement, the guaranteed minimum income, the personal activity account, the right to training throughout his life etc. and they have trained a very large number of men and women.