

**Cor van Beuningen**  
**European Social Week, Bad Honnef**  
**14 April 2010**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today is the third and last day of our conference. This afternoon, we have two very interesting lectures, one from Jerome Vignon on New Leadership in a participatory society, and one from Eric Borgman, on diversity and a joint path towards a common future for Europe. Then, our chairman Robert Weber will formulate the conclusions of this fourth European Social Week, and finally we will have the closing dinner. The second part of this morning will be dedicated to the Agora presentation. According to the programme, we now would listen to a lecture given by Prof Julie Clague from Glasgow, Scotland, but because of the volcano problem she was not able to leave Glasgow. So I propose that we use this space to discuss a number of themes that were touched upon yesterday, but which were left unfinished. May be, in this way we can be of help for Robert Weber, in his job at the end of the conference, and reflect upon the follow up and the next steps.

May I first give you my personal impression - as a first contribution to our debate, obviously. Well, I think that the first statement made by Robert Weber in the programme folder was confirmed in these three days. Yes, we need a European Social Week, yes, we need to reflect upon this big question: What European society do we really want?, and yes, it is our challenge and our duty to help shape this European society that we want. Also because, as Herman Kaiser, if we don't do, who else will?

So we need this platform to help shape the European society that we want. And again, as Elmar Brok made us see so clearly, we need this European society to help shape that new world that we want.

So yes, we go on with this idea, with this initiative. Let me briefly outline, once again, its main features. The European Social Week brings together representatives of the organizations of the workers, and of the employers – as well as representatives of social organizations, of consumer organizations, human rights organizations, organizations working in social housing, in education, in care, in development cooperation - all kinds of Christian social organizations. Yes, Christian organizations, both catholic, protestant or otherwise Christian- the whole Christian spectrum. And finally, the European Social Week brings together Christian organizations from East and West Europe, from all of Europe.

All those organizations share the task of securing the presence and the actualization of Christian Social Thinking, its leading values and principles, and thus help shape the European society that we want.

That is the specific identity and nature of the European Social Week. And this is what we have in common – this sense of purpose, this tradition, these values and these ideals.

What I also noted these three days, both in the plenum as in the working groups and in the corridors, is a good number of points of disagreement. Points of disagreement that I would call it challenging, productive, even pleasant points of disagreement. I myself will never forget Robert Weber exclaim, yesterday: *Denn - was ist sozial??* I was very impressed by the way Leo Pauwels made us see that we are confronting simultaneously old and new realities, at the same time, and that sometimes we are forced to use apply mechanism and instruments that belong to the old world while we would want to perceive the world in another way. Yes, there

is this reality described by Guenther Back in Duisburg, or the case of Carrefour in Belgium as described by Leo, where workers' organizations need to show their teeth and go on the barricades and defend the workers' interests against irresponsible employers – against unsocial or antisocial behaviour from employers. And Robert Weber is right that it is social to fight against this gross injustice. Although, I would add, it is possible that the work of the workers organizations here would be more effective if they would be embedded and connected to other organizations, for example consumer organizations or human rights organizations, which would provide them with other instruments to combat antisocial behaviour - such as those of naming and shaming, publicly compromising the image and fame of the brand name, even consumer strikes such as in the case of Shell and Brent Spar or the Clean Clothes campaigns.

And yes, there is this other reality of new employers, employers that have learned their lessons, or employers that are just good people and responsible Christians, entrepreneurs that go quite far in controlling their whole production chain for responsible entrepreneurship, and that have people and planet next to profit high in their banners. And also, there is this other reality of new employers that establish completely different, new and productive, even synergetic relationships with their workers – the ones described by Krist Pauwels. It is important to understand that what Krist describes is not utopia or charity, but sensible company policy, sensible for making higher profits and on a sustainable basis.

What is most important to me, however, is to see and recognize that the relation between employer and worker is not a fixed one. If we define the employer as our adversary, well, we should not be surprised that he actually behaves as our adversary. Of course, this goes also the other way around. If an employer defines his workers as stupid people that continuously need his instructions and strict control, and as people that only are interested in higher wages and more free time, well, he should not be surprised that his employees behave accordingly. If, on the contrary, as Krist Pauwels suggested, the employer sees his employees as his main assets, he will invest in them so that they are loyal and committed to the company, he will try and have them get out the best out of themselves for the company, and people will feel recognized, rewarded and willing to develop their talents and dedicate their energy and passion to the common good, ah, to the common company.

This brings me to Jean Baptiste de Foucauld, who stated that the specific Christian Social principle is that people should be given the room, that they should be enabled, to develop their talents and to give the best of themselves. Yes, people are entitled to develop their talents, which in our conviction are given by God Himself, to develop their talents in order to assume responsibility for themselves, for others and the common good. We probably all agree on that.

What we probably do not agree on, is how we evaluate the welfare state arrangements that are so characteristic of Western European societies since the fifties – sixties of last century. Most of us see will most probably see the social security systems and the public service delivery systems as the major achievements of Christian and social democracy. Those systems are seen as protecting the people against threatening situations, so that they can develop and live a fruitful and happy life. And now that those systems have become financially untenable, unsustainable, and are to be reduced and broken down, most of us will go very far in trying to defend and maintain them.

But there is of course the other side to these same welfare state arrangements. Have those social security systems and those public service delivery systems for education, care for the old, the young, the handicapped, for whatever social problem that may occur, have those

systems really the effect of enabling people to develop their own talents and to join others to assume responsibility for their own affairs as well as for the common good? I would say: no, not always. And I would claim, on the contrary; the welfare state mechanisms are increasingly having negative effects on the willingness of people to develop their talents, to assume responsibility – even for themselves, let alone for others, of for the common good. What really happened was that the welfare state defined the citizens as clients of their social security systems and as consumers of their public service delivery systems – and yes, again, it is no surprise that people acted accordingly. They sat down on their chair, brought their children to youth care, brought their parents to the institute for the elderly, and looked television or went to Spain for holidays – nothing wrong with holidays, nor with Spain, obviously!

Of course, this process was very much supported and accelerated by the liberal or ego revolution of the sixties and seventies, in which the idea of individual freedom and autonomy was declared sacrosanct. Everybody should be free to make his own life. Of course, nothing wrong with freedom; but its perversion into egotism and selfishness means the end of any civilization. This is true just because of the simple fact that living together is only possible when people are able to transcend egotism and selfishness. Now, the combined presence of the welfare state and libertarian individualism had perverting and destructive effects on the morality of people, on their willingness to assume responsibility for themselves, for others and for the common good, as it had destructive effects on the trust and relations between people, and the social cohesion and social capital of society. Of course, this is not what is meant with social, this is not about Christian social thinking, this does not help people to develop their talents in order to give the best of themselves.

Seen in this way, the fact that the financial crisis and the crises of state budgets and state debts is making the welfare state arrangements untenable and unsustainable, this fact may be a blessing in disguise. People will have to learn again to care for one another, to relate, to assume responsibility - alone and with other people – for themselves, for each other and for common goods and for the Common Good. This will generate a whole new dynamics in society, similar to the one that I think Jean Baptiste de Foucauld was pointing at.

Now again, this is not the only truth. After tomorrow, Robert Weber will again be confronted in Luxemburg with policy proposals that pretend to solve the budgetary problems of the state by taking the money from subsidies to poor families, and of course, it is his duty to defend their income situation. So, there are indeed, multiple realities, old realities and new realities, co-existing simultaneously. This is what makes our life so complicated, and so challenging. That is why the question of Robert Weber is so pertinent: What is social? Indeed, that is not so clear as we might have thought before. Every now and then, we need to have a closer look. What is social, what is to be done? Time and again, we need to read the sign of the times. And that is what the European Social Weeks are for. Thank you very much!

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*Bad Honnef, 14 April 2010*