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Can a regional structure promote human dignity?

- A church conference on political integration and free trade

The main challenges, dilemmas, achievements and disadvantages of the European Union

My church father John Wesley said *the Whole World is My Parish*. That is my view, but I'm aware of my lack of knowledge of that world and therefore very glad to be able to take part of this Conference and share my European view and listen to the Latin American debate.

Since 1994 I have been a member of the Swedish Parliament and the Standing Committee on Constitution but also part of the time in the Committee on European Affairs and the Committee for Foreign Affairs. I'm still in good standing with my church, as an ordained pastor in the Methodist Church in Sweden.

Beyond my work in the parliament I'm also chairing the ILRS, The International League of Religious Socialists, which is an associated member to the Socialist International. We have members in Europe but also the Committee on Religious Affairs within ANC in South Africa and Frente Nacional de Cultos in the Dominican Republic, to mention some. In all the member organisations in ILRS we are involved in developing the ministry and the thinking of a meeting point of religion and politics. Among other things we are just now working on a material on globalisation and on interfaith subjects.

Since some months I'm also chairing the board for the ecumenical church planted Life & Peace Institute in Uppsala, Sweden.

I have a wife and two grown up children and two grandchildren who all are my great joy!

In our modern time all good forces in society must catch up with the globalisation, to use it and to control it. Today the market, the capitalistic forces and the criminal are using it fully, but democracy and the churches are far behind. That is sad because the people of the world, we the citizens of the world, need to be in charge of our own world. The creation requires it and the churches should not be limited by national boundaries. We are, together with other good faiths, careholders of the world – the world of God and all God's children.

1. Challenges in our time

I should like to point out some of the mega trends, challenges and tensions that I see in our time.

- Globalisation; unity and/or widening gaps
- Integration and/or disintegration
- Wholeness and/or fragmentation
- Wealth and/or poverty
- Democratisation and/or the crisis of democratic capacity
- Multilateralism and/or unilateralism
- Patriotism and/or regionalism
- Neoliberalism and/or social justice

Globalisation; unity and/or widening gaps

Globalisation means mainly two things. One is that the world become smaller, we realise more and more that we are each others neighbours. Things going on in one part of the world have its impact on all of us. Someone's need is challenging us all. Poverty is not only a problem for the poor, but creates tensions that create problem for the rich. Much of the wealth creates poverty in other parts and so on.

The other sign of globalisation is that short-sighted perspective and cultural dominance seems to be one sided. Globalisation looks like colonisation and cover the whole world with views and perspectives from the wealthy western countries (the north). In many ways all this means that globalisation is not new – it's old like humankind. But the speed is higher than ever before and therefore globalisation means something fundamental new in our time. Globalisation contains a great deal of possibilities, but also frightening risks. If not the democratic forces and well-rooted public organisations of ordinary people can be able to challenge the capitalistic short-sighted views we are in great trouble.

Integration and/or disintegration

Globalisation means integration. Politics on national level is no longer enough to cope with the actual challenges and therefore we see a wide attempt of regional solutions. European Union is maybe the most advanced in trying to integrate old national states in to a demanding and requiring union, but without changing the fundamentals of these old nations. But – in the same time – we see disintegration. On Balkan the former Yugoslavia now is more than 5 countries, the independence in Scotland and Northern Ireland are developing; the Basque part of Spain try to develop their independence, the former Soviet Union fell apart and so on. The unification processes can – properly developed – contain both the fragmentation and the need of bounder free co-operation.

Wholeness and/or fragmentation

The need to keep everything together is challenged from two sides; one is the problems with big scaled solutions – people start asking questions where the power has gone – and the other is the need to have an easier over sight over their world.

Wealth and/or poverty

You maybe can't say that there is a specific amount of wealth in the world and that has to be divided fairly. The wealth can develop in many places at the same time, but must be properly handled. So still is the unfair distribution of wealth one reason to the tensions in

our world and a permanent engine for tensions, struggle and regional conflicts. The issue of poverty must be addressed more devotedly. Clever societies try to diminish the clefs!

Democratisation and/or the crisis of democratic capacity

Democracy has two sides; on the input side which means free, just and fair elections, dialogue between the elected and the electorate and an involvement in their society. The output side is also important, the elected and the democratic institutions must be able to deliver and to create a change. Today we see a good development towards democratisation but also the problem to be able to create a fundamental change in life for the many.

Multilateralism and/or unilateralism

On one hand we see the need and the development of multilateral structures and decisions in which all countries sit at the table and on the other hand a – mainly – American ruled unilateralism. US decide and UN has to follow – the strike against Iraq is the most recent flagrant example on that.

Patriotism and/or regionalism

I see a continuing tension between nationalism and regionalism. We see it – mainly peacefully – in the European debate but also with much more struggle in Indonesia, and Africa and maybe in Latin America. The nationalistic movements were in many ways a natural reaction to the former colony powers when these countries became independent and needed a more profound one identity. But today with a great need for co-operation regionally the nationalistic narrow-minded views create problems.

Neoliberalism and/or social justice

Today we are living under the dictatorship of “the Holy Market”. Neoliberalism is seen as “the Saviour”. The market has never been able to solve any problems other than that one of profit. We need democratic institutions able to diminish short sighted economic views and structures to promote social justice.

All these tendencies seem to me to be a frame of reference for the discussion on regional integration and nations in co-operation. In short: Can the political field cope with the tensions in these examples – and if so – how?

2. Why do countries choose to organise in regional co-operation?

As a response to all or some of these challenges and tensions regional efforts are taken to see in what way co-operation between countries in more efficient way meet new needs and create new tools for the democratic responsibilities.

We find these nations in co-operation all over the world, in America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

- CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market)
- Andean Community
- MERCOSUR
- FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas)
- African Union and regional;
 - COMESA (Common market of East Africa)
 - SADC (Southern African Development Community)
- ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)
- EU

Common objectives found for the regional co-operations seem to be:

- increase economic growth through regional and outregional trade
- peace and stability in the region
- prosperity for the inhabitants of the region

These are the visions – so how is it in reality?

EU is based on trade but there are other models for co-operation. In Latin America and Southern Africa countries based their co-operation on joint infrastructure (power, communication and transport) and it was common in Latin America during the 1960s and in Southern Africa during the 1990s with joint economic interest in promoting new industries. Trade may be secondary to political or security objectives, and rather a tool than an objective.

Trade intertwines countries and people and makes an unpeaceful settlement more costly. In that way trade could be seen to contribute to peace and stability. The organisations set up for regional co-operation also work as a frame where to deal with other regional disputes in a peaceful way. Many of our problems are no longer only local or national issues, the environment is one example. We must cross borders to come to terms with the problems of today and to make the possibilities of tomorrow come true. Regional co-operation is one of these levels we must learn to utilise whether it concerns trade, fighting crime and ensuring a healthy environment.

Another perspective is how these regional institutions relate to each other. In one way they are competitors – and the capitalistic structure needs competitors. In another way they are co-workers in the field of human democratic co-operation. We must search the mega trend in the area of uni- or multilateral world-views. The democratic and the economic arenas need plurality. It is not good for the world - neither for the world's only superpower US - with the North American dominance in world politics. These are sensitive issues. I'm not stressing the opportunity to harden tensions between US and regional structures, but I see the need to create an environment for multilateralism.

Every democratic structure is politically neutral – it is a system for decision making. The question is what political ideas you put into the system and if the voters will support them.

2.1 Is EU a good example of a regional co-operation?

The historical background of the European Union

The second world wars left the continent and the people of Europe in ruins for the second time in 35 years. It was urgent to find political solutions to hinder another war and to heal the continent.

A solution was presented by the foreign minister of France, Robert Schuman, he suggested the creation of a common Steel and Coal Union. *“World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.”*

The solution for peace and prosperity was this *Coal and Steel Community*, which would not only eliminate the risk of war but make it impossible. The old-age rivals

Germany and France had to be forced into co-operation which would bind them together. The pooling of coal and steel production was not only going to prevent war and promote co-operation it would also provide for a set up of a common foundation for economic development. It changed the destinies of those regions, which had long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they had been the most constant victims. Jean Monnet who greatly influenced Robert Schuman stated that: *“The countries of Europe are not strong enough individually to be able to guarantee prosperity and social development for their peoples. The states of Europe must therefore form a federation or a European entity that would make them into a common economic unit.”*

During the coming 40-50 years the European Community increased in size starting with the admittance of the Great Britain and Denmark in 1972. The southern European countries were admitted in the 1980s after the totalitarian system in Portugal and Spain with their dictators and Greece with their military in power. The newly democratised countries of the south consolidated in the process and contributed further to stabilise the continent. In 1995 northern Europe, except Norway, joined along with Austria. The biggest historical widening of the union took place this year (2004) the 1st of May when 10 countries, 8 of them from the former Soviet Union and their allied, joined EU.

With the admittance of 10 new countries the wounds of the world wars and the cold war can finally start to heal. But the near doubling of countries and inhabitants of EU also bring new implications for the union to which I will return later on. At the same time the union continues to grow with more eastern European countries. Countries on the Balkans and Turkey are still waiting on the doorstep.

The character of EU

The unique structure of our co operation is built on the three main institutions; *The European Commission, the Council(s)* and *the European Parliament*. The Commission is responsible for the wholeness of the union. No national parties are more important than the other. The Council represents the nations. Democratic governments represent their countries and are responsible for that toward their national parliament and the people. The Parliament represents the people of Europe, now 450 millions. This is a unique political structure and still the awareness of its opportunities is not fully understood by the Europeans.

The widening of EU has gone hand in hand with a deepening of the co-operation. Because of the advantages of scale and since one subjected is related to another, it has been a natural development to enhance the areas of co-operation. The primary focus was for a long time the setting up of the economic and monetary union, which also gave real benefits. The *European Monetary Union* will hopefully bring economic stability to the continent. A larger currency reduces the possibility of speculations and makes trade easier. This far the common European currency has proved strong and has become a real alternative to the dollar-dominance in the world, not at least in Africa.

But the perspective must now be broadened and we fight for a new direction, focusing more on growth and employment. A social agenda has been adopted within EU and goals have been set (*The Lisboa-process*). These goals must produce concrete results for all categories of workers. There are still trade unions struggling under oppression in EU and workers rights are being violated every day. We must aim for a social treaty where proper and safe working conditions are provided, job insecurity reduced, discrimination fought and common policies respected.

Along with the deepening- and the widening-process the built structure and original

values must be guarded. Such a step was taken with the redraft of the complex composite of treaties into a *European Constitution*. It was rewritten during 2003 and broad layers of the national parliament and NGO's were included in that process. There is now a European Constitution ready to be signed it will for the first time be a document possible to overlook and therefore easier to grasp. It clarifies the structure and distribution of power and brings in fundamental values upon which the co-operation must rest, the human rights for example. It will clearly strengthen the role of the European citizenship.

The dissolving of the Yugoslavian Federation in the 1990s once again brought war and insecurity to the European continent. It revokes the original purpose of the union. Earlier attempt to co-operate in the area of military and security had failed but the human suffering across the boarders forced EU to choose to fight for everyone's right to live them. The co-operation on civil and military defence is ever since then growing and a common security strategy has been adopted. Several missions have successfully been carried out in Balkan and in Africa. The next goal is to create a rapid force of reaction, which should be ready within 15 days whenever an emergency appears. This summer EU is taken over the responsibility of Bosnien Herzegovina from NATO. Peace has returned to Balkan but there is still a long way to go. A majority of the countries is now seeking membership in EU and we hope to bring them in some time soon. Foreign-aid programmes are being used to help the countries to reach the level required to entering.

EU is today the biggest aid-donor in the world but the system is surrounded of mayor bureaucracy and therefore poorly utilised. A more effective way of distributing the means could mean a great difference not only for Balkan but also to the developing world.

EU has accomplished a lot when former dictator ruled countries became democracies; Portugal, Spain and Greek. The economic standard and the living circumstances for the citizens has increased, Ireland is perhaps the best example. Supporting Human Rights has been effective in the application countries, Turkey is one example.

Challenges and difficulties

The need for co-operation in the time of globalisation has increased the meaning of the European integration. But in this process we can also see the opposite trend of fragmentation. People who are not involved in the process of regional integration find themselves lost in the process. Either they start to question where the power is going or they just capitulate in the process of understanding due to the lack of knowledge. The results from the last elections to the European parliament shows that a very low degree of inhabitants in Europe used their right to vote and the new critical parties were able to improve their positions. EU, as a relatively new structure in many member countries, is not well known but seen as a massive structure impossible to influence on.

At the same time is EU limited to engage a normal voter by the areas of co-operation. It is not easy to see how the de-regulation of trade affect an average citizen compared to the policy of day-care taken by the local government. A professor in Sweden calls this the dilemma of the table-kitchen, which means that as long as EU does not touch upon the subjects which families discusses over a dinner it will be very difficult to involve them. The new social agenda can hopefully change this and bring in the European level as a natural level in the ordinary life of a European citizen. For the benefit of the citizens, the decision-making process on Europe must be made more transparent. The principle of public access to official records must be a rule rather than exception.

The EU-critical parties advanced in the latest elections to the European parliament. Often they have a very nationalistic agenda with xenophobic elements. This trend is alarming. The identity of the nation and that one in the region should not be a contradiction. The two identities should and can be combined. As we are today able to have strong feelings for our hometown as well as our country we must be able to identify with the people in both our country and in our region as well as beyond that.

The absence of this feeling of togetherness can be seen in the discussion of gross and net contributors to the EU-budget. The member-countries contribute to the common budget according to their GNP. The redistribution is not made upon the economic state of the countries but divided mainly through two tools; the common agriculture policy and the regional structure programme.

The richest countries have recently joined in a declaration saying they will not tolerate the budget being increased above 1% of the GNP for the countries in the European Union. At the same time they have been able to negotiate so that they will not lose the economical support through the common agriculture policy and the regional structure programme to the new poorer EU-countries. The equal possibilities to economic development are therefor limited by nationalistic protectionism. The solidarity between the people of Europe can not stop at the national boarder. This will be essential for the future. The integration of the new 10 countries is depended on that, not only economically but also emotionally since this debate creates a division along economical lines. The widening of the union has brought implications to the EU table. The allocation of funds, seats in the parliament and in the commission, the right to move freely and seek jobs in the whole union, are all issues that have been debated. But the widening has also brought possibilities, which has been less debated. The focus has too often been on the short-term negative consequences not on the long term positive gains for the region as a whole.

EU can make its voice heard thanks to a common foreign policy. With over 450 millions inhabitants in 25 countries and a fourth of the worldproduction EU should be able to influence the long term political and economical choices forming the wealth and stability in the EU and the rest of the world. It does not want to be a dominant military power but it can use its power to serve its values. I heard newly an American who said; Europe is to weak to lead, and to proud to follow – that is an interesting and adequate insight.

As the world's largest foreign aid donor EU could make a difference in the developing world with a more coherent agenda. Together with peacekeeping forces ready to support the decisions taken by UN to protect democracy and human rights EU could support and promote peace and stability.

EU promotes multilateralism and the development of other regional co-operations. Stronger voices working to solve the common problems and promote prosperity are needed. Europe fought for the creation of the WTO because that organisation handles trade disputes with objective procedures and thus protects us from unilateralism. The success of the WTO in managing the conflict between the EU and the US testifies to the importance of multilateralism in the new international context.

The common agriculture policy in EU calls for an urgent reform. It has not only proven costly for the union, but also unfair for the developing countries. As a promoter of multilateralism and free and fair trade EU looses credibility when protecting the own agricultural market. EU must stop to subsidise an inefficient agricultural market which is an obstacle for the developing countries.

2.2 Conclusions

1. The common market has unified former enemies.
2. Free trade supports the compatativeness of Europe.
3. Common standards are safe guardening the European citizens.
4. The social responsibilities are growing but depend on political positions.
5. We have seen a deepening cooperation.
6. We have expanded the common legislation.
7. Forming a Constitution means that we can improve the very meaning of an European Citizen-ship (a kind of double control of citizen right).
8. It will also mean that we now are questioning the predominant national politics; Blair, Persson are acting more as national representatives than showing that they come from the same party-family and the very meaning of “his/shes voter” will be questioned (politic as representing ones people will be put against ideas which focus the right of Europeans or the needs in the world, global environmental quests and so on).
9. Turkey and the Balkan state must get involved.
10. A regional structure CAN be an obstacle to neoliberal ideas and promote a global legislation on social justice.
11. EU can be a world actor (with all its limitations) for multilateral solution and strengthening the role of UN.
12. EU must be a clearer voice for reciprocity in relation especially towards the developing countries.

We are national actors in the international arena and we need to enter the international arena through co-operation and use it for democratic means to make the world a better place to live. There is a need to unite over boarders for the causes we believe in. The national mind-set must be broadened. In the vision for the Asian regional co-operation for 2010 there is to be read:”*We envision a Southeast Asia where our mountains, rivers and seas no longer divide us but link us together in friendship, co-operation and commerce.*” This shows the paradigm of thinking that we need to change. The rivers should no longer divide us but link us together.

EU has stepped into the international arena successfully in some ways but is also facing new and old problems of integration, democratic deficit and so on. The importance of being present to influence the decision-makers and being a part of the decision-making bodies can not be stressed enough. EU is a new organisation still under construction and we are all responsible for the further outcome of it and its impact on the rest of the world.

3. Democratisation and poverty

Democracy is the only way to a healthy structure of human co-operation and handling of power. You can’t say it solves all problems. In some way it’s perhaps more proper to say that it create problems, not at least the short sighted perspectives to get the “vote maximum” versus the long term views on development and social justice. The longing to win can take over from the ideas and devotions. The use of the power structure for a personal winning is another risk, but as someone has said; *Democracy is the worst power*

structure – if you exclude all others. In no time before there has been so much democracy in our world. It has also been said that democratic countries don't go to war against each other. All who know the history knows that that isn't true either.

But, after all these question marks it's time to adore and pay the tribute and reverence to Democracy. The basis is of course the respect for ALL human, an individualistic approach which theory contains human rights and the dignity of all who has the right to vote also can be elected – an egalitarian perspective.

But the democratic institutions are loosening its credibility if and when they aren't able to meet urgent needs and the expectations of the citizens. And – that is special frightening – also democracy as such will be questioned. Surely the expectation can be wrong, but an empty stomach always tells the truth.

Therefore we need a restoration of democracy at all level – in the same time. The local institutions must be strong enough to meet the immediate needs, resources are required, and a political structures which can handle these multilevel democracy. We need of course a good functioning state but – in our time – we also need good regional and global structures.

It must be truth that democratic leaders can not see his one people starve and he (or she) will not go to war against other democratic leaders.

It is also important to see that strong institutions are a guard for democracy. The democratic system need a solid institutional framework and within that rules of law the political parties should fight based on ideas and representability.

4. Churches (and other faith communities) and relation to political bodies and political movements

I look upon these meeting as a very healthy one; church people coming together to reflect on political challenges. That doesn't mean that the churches or the church leaders as such should search for the political power – but that a living faith community always has to relate to the surrounding society; the faith community is in the world but not from the world. It's important for the churches; we must be aware of tendencies in our one time. It is also good for the world (the society) to have theological and ethical standpoints in the political analysis. From ANC in South Africa we have much to learn for this living exchange of views. When ANC went to election in April this year the Commission on Religious Affairs made a multi religious theological analyse of the ANC manifesto.

From my European experience we see how former state church countries more and more become religiously independent, or neutral, and after hundred of years the debate on religious influences still are sharpening the debate on religious business and denominations relation to politic, freedom of religion and limits for that freedom Not at least the Muslim traditions are examples, which contain a risk that religious perspectives also become a secular power. It will not mean that the Muslim nations by that become religious, rather that the faith communities become secular.

The faith communities' influence on policies in US is – in my understanding - another alarm clock. Narrow sighted churches make minor issues to political symbols and through vote maximum the candidates in the election adjust their agendas. In that view more fundamental religious demands; as love, human dignity, the value of a human being, the ethical standards and so on and so forth diminish to symbolism. Poverty reduction, reconciliation and good power structure must be much more important for the faith communities than homosexuality and abortion. I'm fully aware of the

controversially of this, but this is important examples for the focus for the faith communities; for their own sake but also for the society.

If churches just saying what people expect from them no one listen any longer. But if the faith communities could be able to focus on the fundamental basis in their own traditions, messages, the theological reflection and the ethical standard could meet a total different response.

The political integration focuses three items;

- The universality of the faith communities
- The limitation of patriotism
- The need for a political struggle against destruction

The faith communities admit a membership way beyond the nation-state. We are all each others sisters and brothers. No exclusion on skin colour, cultures nor sex. The history tells the sad story of the churches involvement in apartheid in the south, oppression of black people in the north, unawareness on poverty, and blindness for structural inequalities and so on.

The global multi-faith movements have now a golden chance to focus the real challenges for the political leaders of the world. That should be based on human equality, human dignity, reconciliation and a common fight also to structural unrighteousness'. It's not only a message from the churches, but also to the faith-communities themselves. We can devote our selves to the struggle on this 21st Century (or 3rd Millennium) of the world as one world.

Regional co-operation can be seen as a tool for that.

From the European soil we have had two world wars on the basis of nationalism or if you want patriotism. The nation state still struggle with its role in a new world order but I'm totally clear that a stronger multinational or multilateral view now is required. United Nations is one important tool. The structure of UN, its power and resources, including democratic structure, must be renewed. Poverty reduction must have an equal status with that as security now have. Already today is the national sovereignty questioned in the UN system – with all right – but in a future it must be even more so. It's not a defendable fundamental right to treat your own people in a bad manor. On the other hand that can not mean that one strong nation, or a couple of them could feel free to do as they wish. But in a real multilateral way the world community must be able to interfere much clearer, stronger and faster than today.

The patriotism could not be supported by the faith communities. It shouldn't be possible that in any church pray for the war machine or their nation's soldier in a fight to other Children of God. It will not mean that there will not be any war, Evils has always to be "fought".

Poverty in a personal way - and in a structural way - must be declared war. Economic structures, corrupt leaders, unfair trade, oppressions, and short-sighted economic entrepreneurs are on the focus for this "Just War". The divide of the world in rich and poor, within a country and beyond national borders is a source also for terrorism. A clever society shall not create clefts. Good societies create community. Poverty is not only a problem for the poor, but threatens also the rich.

To summarise:

1. We need more of co-operation within the democratic systems
2. Unilateralism is dangerous for the world

3. Multilateralism shall be shaped
4. We need as one tool regional co-operation
5. The major challenge – that on poverty reduction – need a set of tools within the new world order
6. There is not one single simple tool to use
7. Regional institutions can sharp our wider views
8. The faith communities can talk more clearly on the major challenge in our time
9. We shall abstain from being nationalistic
10. All humans are most valuable in the eyes of God

Most of what I have said here must be said also in Europe. I'm not here to tell you what to do – because our faith communities have not been heard in this clear voice. Church organisations are involved in the European Union work at different levels but the faith communities have not reached the right level of being a challenging voice in our co-operation.

Therefore I welcome this meeting and initiative and wish you all the best in focusing on the meeting points between politics and faith. We are faithful when we make it clear that we are not from the world but live in the world. So, as Mr Wesley said; The World is my parish – and so is yours!