

16th October 2021

As Christian lay people from different European countries, we are committed to the importance of the rule of law as a pillar of any functioning democracy. The principle of the rule of law means that all public actors act within the limits of the law. They do so in accordance with the values of democracy and fundamental rights, and under the supervision of independent and impartial courts. Governments are thus bound by law. The rule of law also includes the fight against corruption, conflicts of interest in violation of legal requirements and the protection of media freedom.

As citizens, we are worrying that individual freedom is at stake. This is especially the case in the states that have achieved recently the democratic transition. The rule of law can only be effective if the independence of the judiciary remains unchallenged and freedom of the press is upheld. We advocate a non-partisan consensus, on two levels: Within each of our Member States we must rebuild such consensus, particularly on a truly independent judiciary which only serves the law and is never “captured” by one political or social faction. And across Europe we also need a strong consensus on the rule of law, which on the one hand recognises the primacy of European Union law, but on the other hand also respects national competences and cultural diversity in Europe, especially in matters of family law. Unity in diversity - this may also apply here if all recognise and implement the common standards. The EU is more than a cooperation project of individual states, it is a union. As Christians for Europe, we will do what we can to help building such non-partisan consensus both within our various countries and between them.

Last year, two further instruments were created. The Commission initiated a “Rule of Law” mechanism under which the situation in all Member States is regularly monitored. Moreover, a new “Conditionality” Regulation allows the Union to respond to certain breaches of the Rule of Law which endanger the EU’s budget. This can lead, in the last resort, to a Council decision by qualified majority to suspend EU payments to a Member State.

The current rule of law deficiencies in some Member States are worrying us deeply as Christian lay people. Those who deliberately attack the rule of law violate the essential values of the Union, such as equality and solidarity. This therefore affects not only the domestic fabric, but also the European architecture. They can undermine the very foundation of our common European house. Dealing with them in an efficient, fair and consistent manner is a balancing act and a crucial test for European integration.

We advocate common, integrating solutions and firmly reject the withdrawal of further member states from the European Union. We call for governments to act in a responsible manner fully acknowledging the dramatic consequences of infringements to the rule of law. At the same time, there can only be equality of citizens and States in Europe if EU law is upheld and the Rule of Law entrenched in each Member State.

The Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE) is an association of lay organizations and committed Christians from different European countries. General concern of IXE is to incorporate a more vivid awareness of a united Europe in the national debates. The initiative aims at fostering the encounter of Christians in Europe and to promote the Social Doctrine of the Church in order to achieve a better mutual knowledge and understanding of historical and cultural differences. More information: www.initiative-ixe.eu.