

[Call for Action from the Justitia et Pax Commission of the Croatian Conference of Bishops](#)

The Commission urges believers and all citizens of good will in the Republic of Croatia to participate in the widespread campaign of the European Sunday Alliance.

The Justitia et Pax Commission of the Croatian Conference of Bishops urges believers and all citizens of good will in the Republic of Croatia to participate, starting on Sunday, March 4, 2012, in the widespread campaign of the European Sunday Alliance, which unites labor unions, political parties, civic associations and Churches in the demand for respecting Sunday as day of rest for all, a day for families to be together, a day for voluntary, cultural and social activities and as the Day of the Lord that Christians celebrate and glorify.

1. The Commission urges Croatian citizens, especially Christians, to refrain as of that day from shopping on Sundays and, thus, at least show that they want to respect all those workers who, due to the weaknesses of Croatian legal safeguards, are subjected to pressure and forced to work without Sunday as a day of rest, remaining outside the circle of their families, loved ones and children. These employees, especially female workers—the mothers, sisters and daughters of many—on this day of rest will not be with their families. Due to their absence, their homes will be empty, grey and gloomy. Therefore, shopping on Sundays is a form of hypocrisy and insensitivity toward the disenfranchised.

2. The human being, whom a democratic government has no right to scorn, and even businessmen in the "social market economy" of the European Union [have no right] to exploit, is not merely a producer and consumer of goods and services. A person affirms and supports himself through work but he is more than a worker and much more valuable than a consumer. A person is a spiritual being, turned toward transcendence but also to culture and art, sports, recreation and, generally, social and political engagement. However, people can only fulfill these needs by being and acting together with others, at the same time and on the same day. If this opportunity is taken away from some people, it deprives them of their basic rights as citizens, parents and, simply, integral persons, and in society there is a reduction in social cohesion and the will to live together. In all of this is the meaning and value of a day when one does not have to work. Until recent times, Sunday was respected in our country, even somewhat during the era of communist dictatorship, which, unfortunately, did much in order to distance people, especially the young, from celebrating the Day of the Lord.

3. With the coming of democracy, it is justifiable to expect that respect for Sundays would become the rule. However, we are witnesses to the onslaught of neoliberal greed that also destroys Sundays, even in our country where 91% of the citizens declare themselves to be Christians. Thus, even the Constitutional Court, under pressure from the chain stores, has deviated from European tradition and practice, allowing employers to set the working hours of stores and places of production, thereby jeopardizing the rights as well as the physical and mental health of Croatian citizens. Thus, the legislators—the Croatian Parliament and its censor, the Constitutional Court—already in 2006 allowed the private interests of the minority

to prevail over public benefits—health, social, family and spiritual—of the majority of citizens. Those who have imposed their position throughout Croatia certainly do not want to understand that Croatian citizens are not going to spend more than they already do on their needs if stores are open on Sundays. Citizens will spend the same amount of money from Monday to Saturday, since Saturday for the majority of employees is already a work-free day.

4. Why then are tens of thousands of people, especially women who are the least protected group in our country among the employed, still placed in a position of slavery every Sunday and holiday? Finally, we ask ourselves, have not traditional working hours, from Monday through Friday, always been coordinated with the time that students spend in school? After all, we know that Article 31 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union from the Lisbon Treaty of the EU enacts a worker's rights "to daily and weekly rest periods" and "to working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity." Does not Article 33 of the same Charter impose the duty on everyone "to reconcile family and professional life"? Is not, therefore, Sunday the only day that no one should be permitted to interfere with or endanger? Research conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and other institutions has shown that work at unusual times, especially during weekends, is dangerous for safety, health, wellbeing and work-life balance, and is the cause of many accidents at work and illnesses.

5. We know, understand and accept that there are services of general and public interest that must be provided—healthcare, safety, traffic etc.—even on Sundays and holidays. We know that it is necessary to accept some flexibility in tourism areas, although there are countries with strong tourism activity that, nevertheless, succeed in observing Sundays. However, in our country we see the spread of aggressive and exploitive tendencies in private services that do not have to be offered on Sundays and holidays, directed toward thousands of women employed in stores who, otherwise, work overtime—very often unpaid—not only every day but also on Sundays and holidays, for a minimum wage of 2,500 HRK, often without a single free day or they have a day off when their children are in school and their families are at work or not home. Finally, we do not shy away from the fact that with this appeal we are also fighting for the rights of all Christians—not only Catholics—to celebrate the Day of the Lord by attending Sunday Mass because Sunday was made for man, not man for Sunday.

6. A year ago, the initiative European Sunday Alliance (ESA) was launched as a network of the civil society throughout Europe, with the goal of protecting Sundays and holidays as work-free days for all on the national levels and on the level of the European Union. In the EU, this initiative has not succeeded everywhere because the Union has hesitated over this issue. It is expected that the ESA will establish a European Commission to initiate the legal protection of work-free Sundays everywhere. The network of the European Sunday Alliance, which has already brought together 55 major participants and 23 supporting institutions, reminds people that Sunday in the EU has already been recognized as a weekly day of rest but only in the Directive on the Protection of Young People at Work. The initiative for work-free Sundays for all is strongly supported by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community. The ESA again urges everyone to stand "Together for Decent Working

Hours," for fair and equitable working conditions and to express their will in various ways in their countries.

7. The *Justitia et Pax* Commission of the Croatian Conference of Bishops recalls that on two occasions, June 2000 and November 2004, it has strongly expressed its support for the preservation of the culture of work-free Sundays and the legalization of work-free Sundays in Croatia. In this sense and spirit, the Commission urges Christians and all people of good will in Croatia to join this noble—civil, humane and Christian—European campaign of solidarity and as of March 4 to bring to life its initiatives by refraining from shopping and visiting stores on Sundays, and to report to the European Sunday Alliance and the Croatian media about this. Finally, the Commission urges, particularly Christian and Catholic alliances and associations, as well as unions and political parties, to join the European Sunday Alliance, www.europeansundayalliance.eu, and support the initiatives of this great movement for a free and more humane Sunday. We are confident that this will be a powerful witness to solidarity with the victims of the dictatorship of profits and at the same time for the faithful an effective and authentic sign of Lenten sacrifice. "And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you" (Mt, 6:18).

In Zagreb, February 29, 2012

Vlado Košić, Ph.D., President of the Commission
Bishop of Sisak