

## 21<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Renovabis, Munich (D) – 6-8 September 2017 „The Crisis as a Chance for Europe! The Responsibility of the Churches“

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Due to the renovation of the Renovabis-headquarters at the Domberg in Freising (which will probably last a few years), this year's Conference was held at the Munich School of Philosophy in Schwabing. Some 200 participants from 28 countries attended.



In his introduction, the Director of Renovabis, Rev. Christian Hartl, advocated going back to the practice of the art of communication. The crisis opens the door to discernment, communication leaves room for understanding. "Every crisis is also an opportunity. We stop and listen to others. It is an opportunity to go back to the origins".

For the Archbishop of Berlin Dr. Heiner Koch, Chairman of the Action Committee of Renovabis, Europe seems to have lost its momentum: "The European Union has an acute need for reform". However, the basic problem is that Europeans have no clear perception of the European Union and of Europe as a whole. "We should bravely put new well rooted foundations to Europe instead of isolating us behind our borders. Every great thing grows through sharing. We lack historical awareness: what history will we leave to the generations after us?". Mgr. Koch suggested initiating a learning process to better perceive the other and listen to him in a climate of trust. "For us Christians, the mission of the creation of Europe is a challenge and a responsibility. "We must express our message with strength and conviction."



The sociologist of religions András Máté-Tóth from Hungary reminded participants in his opening speech that societies in Central and Eastern Europe "have a special sensitivity to paternalism. While Western Europe focuses on the individual right to self-determination, it is the social side which prevails in the East for historical and cultural reasons. He urged the Eastern Europeans to give up their victims' perspective and those of the West to take the "wounded" collective identity of the East seriously. It proceeds from unsatisfied desires and historical trauma that led to the deportation of minorities, the prohibition of minority languages, the persecution of Christians and dissidents as well as genocides as "highlights of a trauma history". Unlike what happens in Western Europe, is not secularization which is the key to understand the problem in the former communist countries, but lethargy, an inevitable consequence of their culture. "Almost all societies in Central and Eastern Europe are dissatisfied with the state of their democracy," explains Dr. Máté-Tóth. Lethargy also concerns the question of truth: "The world has become so complex that all statements are based on an uncertain foundation". The Church has a "healing" role to play.



The co-speaker Prof. Dr. Irena Lipowicz from Warsaw warned the participants: "The crisis of the democracy affects us all, Europe as a whole. The idea of the state of law remains a matter of survival for Europe. Still, the Church of Poland seems as divided as society as a whole. The Church should maintain its autonomy and distance from changing governments."

The second co-speaker, the journalist and political scientist Dr. Andreas Püttmann, warned against a growing contempt of liberal democracy and reminded that freedom is "a central value of Christianity". "Democracy is misinterpreted as the rule of the majority; however, it is the rule of the entire people". He recalled the high social power of Christian beliefs. The democratic State also lives on the fruits of the existence of the Church.

During a panel discussion, the President of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK), Thomas Sternberg, recalled the incomprehension and frustration caused by the BREXIT among the Europeans about a year ago. "The EU has not invested in the soul of its citizens, in their emotional relationship with Europe". He pleaded for a rediscovery of the European roots and values: "We need not less Europe but more Europe to help us overcome the nationalism of the 19th century with its devastating consequences". It is time to internalize the European integration. "Christians are still a majority in Europe and Catholics are the largest group".

The Nigeria-born priest, theologian and social ethicist Obiora Ike criticized that Europe has denied its identity and history: "Europe is not Europe without Christianity!". Compared with the global problems, those in Europe are small, but the Europeans do not stop "crying and moaning" at a high level.

Mrs. Alena Alshanskaya, historian of Eastern Europe from Minsk, accused the Russian orthodoxy to focus more on the moral decline of Europe than on the violations of human rights in Russia. The Russian orthodoxy kindles an 'anti-European sentiment in Eastern Europe' and gleefully watches the European crisis.

It is in roundtables and small groups that the Congress participants then looked during one day and a half into the crisis in Europe and visions for the future. The issue was also raised if there was not an "ideology of secularization" in the EU which the public sphere. There was "the responsibility of every hope". Several groups debated face of diversity - also at the level prospects. Given the proportion quarters of the European common basis of Christian make Europe stronger. as a keyword. It not only relates the past, caused by violence between nations, towards ethnic minorities or between religious groups, but also of archaic phenomena such as the vendetta in Albania.



would try to oust religion from agreement on the fact that it is Christian to bear witness of on the question of unity in the of experiences and future of Christians equal to three-population, a reflection on the values could be a chance to "Reconciliation" was identified to the healing of the wounds of

"Reconciliation" will also be the central topic of the Pentecost action of Renovabis for 2017, said Rev. Hartl at the end of the Assembly. As to forthcoming activities, there is first a very important Congress, 'Re-thinking Europe', which will be held on 27-29 October 2017 in Rome: COMECE will convene high-level political representatives, bishops and delegates from Church organizations, religious and the youth on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the treaties of Rome in order to promote dialogue and joint reflection on the future path of the European Union.

The 22nd International Congress of Renovabis will take place on 26-28 September 2018 at the Catholic Academy in Berlin and will address the theme "Remember, Act, Reconcile".

From the UCESM-General Secretariat in Brussels, September 2017