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The European Green Deal – How can faith-based actors contribute to a greener Europe?



The European Parliament in Brussels hosted, on Tuesday, 28 Jan 2020, a dialogue seminar on the European Grean Deal (EGD) – the flagship environmental policy programme of the current European Commission, which, if fully implemented, will hugely impact on the EU's approach to environmental issues, over the next few decades. Representatives of churches and other faith-based actors in Europe were invited to share their thoughts on the package of measures envisioned, and to offer suggestions on how religion could contribute to the lessening of the pressure currently exercised by human activities on the environment.

Organised in the margins of the Art. 17 TFEU dialogue, the seminar was hosted by Mrs. Mairead McGuiness, First Vice-President of the European Parliament and responsible for the Parliament's implementation of Article 17 TFEU. The European Commission was represented by Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life and the one leading the Commission's Article 17 Dialogue.

In the opening of the event, Mr. Schinas stressed that the EGD is basically about

two main things: the goal that the EU would become carbon neutral by 2050 and a set of measures to help us ease the transition to this reality. “Our art. 17 partners have repeatedly stressed the necessity of rethinking our relation with nature, throughout the years. They repeatedly emphasised that, when dealing with environment policies, we need to work with a holistic perspective, and not merely with a technical and/or financial one. What we need is indeed a human ecology, that seriously takes into account the social dimension of our environment policies,” said Mr. Schinas. Addressing one of the most thorny issues related to the EGD – the costs of the transition to the new paradigm – Schinas made it clear that “this transition will either be just for all, or it will not be at all. The EC will make available more than 100 billion euro to facilitate this process, but it will require not merely an economic, but rather an ethical commitment. This has to do with our way of living, and it is at this point that we will have to be working”. Schinas assured those present that the European Climate Pact will be launched in March and expressed his hope that the Art. 17 Dialogue will give further consideration to this topic, already putting forth a possible conference, hosted by the European Commission, on “the European way of living?”.

On behalf of the Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union (CROCEU) Prof. Dr. Costas Papastavros, from the University of Nicosia showed that, up until now, the effects of climate change have been felt especially by the poorer and most fragile members of our societies, and this in turn leads to social instability. Hence, it is crucial, Dr. Papastavros pointed out, that social aspects become central in the making and implementation of environmental policies.

Building upon the point that what is needed is a change in the European way of living, Rev. Fr. Augusto Zampini Davies, from the Pontifical Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, in the Vatican, underscored that it is precisely here that religion could serve as a strong driving force for change, or conversion. Another particular challenge that Rev. Davies hinted at was the need to pass on these European ambitions beyond Europe, the climate situation being one in need of a global wide solution.

Speaking on behalf of the Conference of European Churches, Rev. Dr. Peter Pavlovici stressed that Churches in Europe have already been doing a lot on climate action, over the past few years and that churches in Europe generally support EGD. Hinting at the same need for a substantial change of behavior, Dr. Pavlovici also underscored that the “outsourcing of production outside Europe could not be a real solution; consumption, and not merely production, has to be

diminished”, he said.

From amongst the politicians present at the meeting, Mrs. Laurence Tubiana, a french diplomat and one of the “architects” of the Paris Agreement, stressed how much influential the papal encyclical Laudato Si was in the process leading to the signing of the document. In his turn, Mr. Pascal Canfin, MEP and Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health & Food Safety of the EP, stressed that the battle for the environment has to, and could, be fought from all the various sets of values characteristic to the European political families; moreover, close cooperation between conservatives, liberals and progressists is absolutely necessary, given that no single group has a majority in the EP.

The event can be rewatched here, while the program is available here.



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