

CEC TRG ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

ON THE WAY TOWARDS TO CEC ASSEMBLY 2018

A proposal for the process

PROMOTING ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

Why?

Globally, our relations with nature and with each other have become profoundly unjust. In acquiring great economic wealth we have caused damage to creation that sustains us; with both climate change and loss of natural biodiversity risking chaos to life on earth. And we have not shared the great wealth we have acquired equally. Both within countries, across Europe and around the world we have created great and systematic inequalities of wealth. Poverty exists alongside affluence within communities at every geographical scale. This indifference to nature and to each other is an affront to God.

How has this come about?

We have pursued economic growth without considering the consequences. We have treated nature as source of raw materials and a sink for our wastes; we have claimed that our affluence is a just reward for our industry and effort; and not a gift from God to be shared justly between people and nations. We have lost sight of the commandment to love others; and we have forgotten how to care for the earth.

What do we want?

Economic Justice: a more equal distribution of the wealth of nature between people on different continents, within Europe, between genders and among minority populations.

Ecological justice: that we take not more from the earth than we need; that we recognise that our wasteful greed is causing climate chaos and the massive loss of species and habitats; that we repent of this and seek to build an economy that can sustain all life on earth.

What does this mean in practice?

Uncontrolled economic growth is blind to the inequality or ecological damage it creates and cannot be sustained; we must question the purpose and direction of the economy we have created. Can we design an economy that will share wealth more equally within countries, across Europe and in the wider world; and can we share economic power more justly between men, women, people of different ages and abilities or disabilities and minority groups? Can we design an economy that will not put at risk the rights of future generations; an economy that does not degrade or impoverish creation but enriches it? In summary can we create a caring economy – or is this idea absurd?

Is this possible?

We believe that it is possible. Just as the ground breaking Paris climate conference and the UN decisions on Sustainable Development Goals create a framework that *could* deliver climate justice and sustainable development, so we believe that agreement between nations can address inequality between peoples. We invite the EU to (once more) develop a policy framework that enables it to

'lead by example'. This could be structured around the incorporation and implementation of the SDG's, particularly as these reflect the very European values the CEC open letter is referring to. Europe should take the lead in this great challenge, through the European Union, European governments, churches and civil society and in partnership with others around the world. We try to discern concrete steps we may in this regard undertake. we should

We are not alone in this quest

The search for economic and ecological justice is growing around us. There are many great examples.

- Voices from developing countries are calling for justice (*add examples from partner churches*)
- The sustainable Development goals of the United Nations and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set out a challenging global vision (*summarise*)
- The political institutions of the European Union encourage us (*describe the ECOSOC and other EU initiatives*)
- The Paris climate agreement points the way to a low carbon future (*include WCC references*)
- Some national governments are looking beyond unfettered economic growth (*examples?*)

Churches and other faith groups are important stakeholders of this process. Many churches across the world and especially in Europe are concerned about development we are facing and are addressing through their practical work and through their theological work as well as dialogue with political leaders, partners in academia, NGO sector and others a need for a more just economy, for respect of a natural boundaries and for a sustainable world.(*examples from CEC member churches etc.*).

The challenge

Despite these many positive signs of change there remains a prevailing orthodoxy that economic growth alone can solve our problems and that free markets are the best way to achieve ever increasing wealth. In the EU this is embedded in the 'four freedoms' (the freedom of movement of goods, people, services and capital over borders) that form the basis of the free market within the EU. The crises facing the EU and the weaknesses of economic governance we have identified in other reports (reference to economic governance) point to the need to revisit how the ideal of a peaceful and truly prosperous Europe might be achieved .

We believe that the free market alone will not bring about the greater equality and respect for nature that we seek but that we will need to reform the economy to ensure it is based on care for each other and respect for creation – *a reformation of the economy*. Social and ecological standards need to be part of any such reform towards a sound economic frame leading to a sustainable future

The SDG agenda is a chance to develop such a positive transformational framework for a sustainable Europe, tackling climate change requiring a long-term energy transition. This would involve rethinking the dominant economic model- the present growth model and the urgent need to develop a circular economy that is inherently sustainable, socially inclusive and low-carbon, where prices reflect the true external costs in terms of climate change and natural resource use. This cannot be done without seriously transforming agricultural, energy and transportation policies.

All of these require a rather radical rethinking of European (economic and social) policies.

Developing such a forward looking transformational policy framework on the basis of the SDG Agenda could also assist in overcoming the present lack of trust of EU citizens in the European project, since it can provide for a new vision, a new civil contract for the future.

What would this economy look like?

The challenge for the group and for churches across Europe is to reimagine the economy; to incorporate those elements we have identified and collected from work in churches and elsewhere across Europe including the following:

- A circular economy, or an economy of enough;
- An economy based on more local production, markets and consumption but more long term vision. How can we, on the other side, avoid a danger of economic protectionism often presented through nationalistic and ideologically extremist attitudes.
- A low carbon (carbon-free?) biobased economy and one that promotes more fair and equal trade both within Europe and with developing countries
- Efforts for discerning the role of finance sector promoting strong Economic and Social Governance across the economy; and also encouraging the growth of a local and just trade economy. On the other hand the sector which would avoid pitfalls which has been characteristic for the sector during recent economic and financial crisis, especially the use of public funds for saving the sector from calamities caused by irresponsible investments.
- An economy in which essential human rights are supported and respected, not traded as merely a 'free movement of labour'.

Recommendations

- That the thematic group explores this challenge, drawing on the examples from around Europe collected by members of the group.
- On the basis of these examples and other meetings and research prepares a paper setting out how we might move towards an economy that will reduce inequality and reduce ecological impacts.
- The report sets out steps to help bring about such an economy locally, nationally, across the EU and globally and makes recommendations for the Assembly.
- That the report sets out recommendations for EU and national governments; CEC, national churches and other partners; ideas or resources for congregations.

Draft: Adrian Shaw, November 2016

Additions: Kees February 2017