



Conference of European Churches Governing Board

Brussels, 20-22 November 2019

Thematic area economic and ecological justice and sustainable future Report on activities

1. 6th International Conference on Ecological Theology and Environmental Ethics (ECOTHEE)

The conference organised by the Orthodox Academy in Crete was held under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and co-sponsored by the Conference of European Churches, the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) and the World Council of Churches took place from 23 - 26 September.

In his message to the conference, the Patriarch Bartholomew underlined a particular role of churches to work on an 'eco-friendly civilisation,' which will be characterised by the 'ecological responsibility and by the respect to the holiness and the beauty of the Creation. The Patriarch stresses that this is a matter of "emergency for our survival".

The event offered an opportunity for over forty theologians and Christian as well as Muslim ethicists from Europe and beyond to work together and focus especially on theological and ethical aspects of churches' and religious engagement with ecology.

The participants of the conference adopted the CRETAN ECOTHEE-19 APPEAL with expressing commitment

- to a sustainable lifestyle,
- to build bridges between art, science, technology, philosophy, psychology and theology,
- to the promotion of the ecumenical, interfaith and multidisciplinary communication and the dialogue of science with philosophy, ethics, theology, art and other cultural manifestations to tackle the root causes of the present ecological crisis, and
- an expression of gratitude to CEC and ECEN.

Contributions to the conference will be published in the volume which is already in the preparation.

2. European Christian Environmental Network team visit in Belarus

The team of European Christian Environmental Network paid a solidarity visit focusing on churches' engagement with care for creation in Belarus from 29 September – 2 October.

The visit aimed to express international ecumenical solidarity and support for churches' work on ecology, as well as to contribute to better information sharing on both sides.

The ECEN representatives were received by H.E. Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, Metropolitan of Minsk-Mohilev Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church and were greeted by Fr. Alexander Shimbaljov, the Vice-Chair of the Synodal Committee on Church and Society of the Orthodox Church in Belarus.

The group learnt about projects focusing on the care for creation carried out by the Centre for Ecological Solutions, that cooperates closely with the Orthodox Church in Belarus, the Roman Catholic Church as well as with the Protestant churches in the country, as e.g. the Minsk parish of St. Nicolaus of Japan and Lavrishevo monastery.

The program of the visit included participation in workshop on the role of churches in care for creation that took place with students of the Institute of Theology of the Belarus State University under the leadership of Prof. Andrei Danilov and participation in a seminar organised at the Theological Academy in Belarus that brought together church-related initiatives focusing on care for creation, as well as a representative of the Belarus Ministry of Environment.

The visit contributed to a deepening of information sharing and mutual appreciation of work being done by churches on care for creation in two different parts of the continent, East and West and offered an opportunity for outlining further cooperation in the future.

3. Churches' action on the EU tentative aim to reach climate neutrality by 2050

The item the EU tentative aim to reach climate neutrality by 2050 has been intensively discussed in the European Council summit in June 2019. Conclusions of the summit revealed that 4 EU Member States: Czechia, Estonia, Hungary and Poland have been opposing the proposed target.

Following the summit conclusions, the CEC study secretary approached churches and ecumenical councils of churches in these countries, taking into consideration

active engagement of churches at least in three out of four mentioned countries. The Synod of the Church of Czech Brethren adopted for example in Mai 2019 conclusion underlining: 'We turn to politicians at all levels, the Parliament and the government of the Czech Republic.... to act wisely, with responsibility and solidarity to slow down climate change and stop the destruction of the environment. '

In reaction to the initiative, a successful action took place in Hungary. Environmental organizations of the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches in Hungary sent a letter to President of the country János Áder encouraging him to support the goal of climate neutrality. The letter has been answered in a kind and positive way underlining: "I am positive that Hungary's actual performance will not stand in the way of the EU reaching carbon neutrality by 2050." The same words have been presented in the public speech of the President a couple of days later.

The action can be taken as an example of active engagement of churches in society, this time with a positive and speedy reaction from the side the highest representative of the state.