15th Russian-German Forum of Civil Societies “Petersburg Dialogue”



The 15th Russian-German Forum of Civil Societies “Petersburg Dialogue” was held on July 14-15, 2016, in St. Petersburg, under the theme “Russia and Germany in Face of Global Challenges”.

Participating in the event were representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, including Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), vice-chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR) and cochairman of the Churches in Europe working group; Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for the far-abroad; Hieromonk Ioann Kopeikin, pro-rector of the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies; Archpriest Constantine Golovatsky, head of the St. Petersburg diocesan youth department; Rev. Antony Borisov, pro-rector of Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary; Rev. Iliya Kosykh, head of the DECR Communication Service; V. Kipshidze, deputy head of the Department for Church-Society and Mass Media Relations; S. Ochkanov, DECR secretariat for the far-abroad; and F. Champion, DECR secretariat for inter-Christian relations.

From the German side, there were Dr. Johannes Oeldemann, co-chair of the Churches in Europe working group and director of the Institute of Ecumenics; Dr. Martin Illert, representative of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany; Dr. Frank Ronge, head of the Faith and Education departments under the secretariat of the German Conference of Catholic Bishops; Mr. Dirk Stelter, representative of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hannover; Ms. Jutta Schnabel, Union of German Catholic Youth; and Rev. Richard Stark, pastor of the St. Petersburg Parish of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to St. Elizabeth.

The forum opened on July 14 with the addresses of its cochairman – V. Zubkov from the Russian side and Ronald Pofalla from the German side. Speeches of greetings were made by S. Zheleznyak, deputy chairman of the Russian State Duma, German Ambassador to Russia Mr. Rudiger von Fritsch, and St. Petersburg Governor G. Poltavchenko. Presentations on the theme of the forum were made by Mr. Olaf Scholz, president of the Hamburg Senate, and Vladimir Region Governor Ms. S. Orlova.

The Churches in Europe working group held a meeting as part of the forum on the theme “The Role of Youth in Forming the Future of Society and Churches in Russia and Germany”. The meeting was cochaired by Archimandrite Philaret and Dr. Oeldemann.

Russian and German participants spoke about missionary work among young people carried out by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany. Both Russian and German participants agreed on the need for church communities to have youth associations, which could involve young converts in active church life.

Challenges faced by young people today became an important part of the discussion. Both Russian and German participants spoke in the first place about the threat of various extremist ideologies spreading widely primarily among the youth. It was noted that young people become increasingly dependent on social networks, which often replace real communication for them.

The forum concluded with a plenary session, which summarized the work of the Petersburg Forum. Before the session, the participants held a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of the victims of the terror action in Nice.

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The Petersburg Dialogue is a forum of the civil societies in Russia and Germany. Established in 2001 at the initiative of President V. Putin and Federal Chancellor G. Schroeder, it is called to promote mutual understanding between Germany and Russia and further development of bilateral cooperation in all the spheres of society.

The Churches in Europe working group is one of the youngest ones in the structure of the Petersburg Dialogue. It held its first meeting in 2007 in Wiesbaden. The working group includes representatives of Christian confessions in Russia and Germany. It meets on a systematic basis alternately in Russia and Germany.

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