St. Petersburg Dialogue forum meets for its regular session



On October 22-24, 2015, the St Petersburg Dialogue, a forum of the civil societies in Russia and Germany, held its 14th session in Potsdam, Germany, under the theme 'Modernization as a Chance for a Common European House'.

The forum was attended by a ROC delegation including Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), a DECR vice-chairman, coordinator of the working group from the Russian side; Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev. DECR secretary for the far abroad; Archpriest Anthony Ilyin, adviser to the chairman of the Russian World Foundation; Hieromonk Ioann (Kopeikin), pro-rector of the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute for Post-Graduate Studies; the Rev. Iliya Kosykh, director of the DECR communication service; V. Kipshidze, director for information and analysis of the Moscow Patriarchate information department, and Ms. S. Ochkanova, DECR secretariat for the far abroad.

The forum began its work on October 22 with a solemn ceremony, during which speeches of greetings

were made by Mr. Christian Goerke, Brandenburg deputy prime minister, V. Grinin, Russian ambassador in Germany, and R. Pofalla and V. Zubkov, co-chair of the forum's presidium respectively from the German and Russian side. Key speeches were made by W. Ischinger, chairman of the Munich Security Conference, and G. Gref, chairman of the Sberbank Executive Board.

On October 23, the forum worked in issue working groups. The working group on Churches in Europe consisting of the ROC delegation and German prominent theologians and university professors, was co-chaired by Archimandrite Philaret and Dr. Johannes Eldemann, director of the Johann Adam Möhler Institute for Ecumenism, and dealt with the theme 'Churches' response to acute challenges faced by Europe today'.

The Churches in Europe working group sought to identify pressing problems encountered today by the societies in Russia and Germany. The special role of Churches in helping overcome manifold crises affecting people's life was noted. In particular, it was pointed out that the Churches in the two countries have a peacemaking potential in resolving conflicts arising in various parts of the world. The group agreed that one of the important problems today is the need to protect Christians in the Middle East and to reflect on the problem of refugees in Europe.

The group also pointed to the demand for developing the practice of students exchanges between theological schools in Russia and Germany and meetings of clergy and laity serving in hospitals and prisons and participating in charity projects. It was deemed necessary to continue reflecting on the Churches' contribution to the protection of God's creation.

Archimandrite Philaret presented Mr. W. Bergmann, the German coordinator of the working groups on Science and Education and Churches in Europe, and Dr. Eldemann church awards granted them by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in recognition of their special contribution to the development of dialogue between the civil societies and Churches in Russia and Germany.

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