# Draft Conclusions of Dialogue seminar «Promoting solidarity in the current economic crisis: the contribution of the Orthodox Church to european social policy» (17 October 2012, Brussels)

**DIALOGUE SEMINAR**

**PROMOTING SOLIDARITY IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS:**

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TO EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY**

**- Draft Conclusions –**

Today, a historical meeting took place between the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA) of the European Commission and the Committee of Representatives of Orthodox Churches to the EU (CROCEU). As the Moderator of the CROCEU, His Eminence, Metropolitan Emmanuel mentioned in his welcome address the very establishment of CROCEU is a very significant event for it demonstrates our inter-orthodox unity, and this first Dialogue Seminar organized together with the BEPA provides an actual implementation of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty on a grass-root level, that is direly needed. Meetings such as this reinforce the value of reflections and observations the Orthodox Church provides government and society for social and economic policy. We are, indeed, a serious and active partner at local, regional, national and European levels for developing efficient and sustainable solutions in the face of difficult economic and social challenges.

The presentations and discussion during this seminar have illustrated in poignant ways that the causes of economic and social issues are complex and multi-dimensional. We recognize and acknowledge that a response to such long term complicated problems cannot be offered that does not also address the historical underlying causality, along with the obvious manifestations presently experienced. In large part, the Orthodox Church has responded with compassion and wisdom. Ever since the beginning of the current economic crisis in Europe, in 2008, the Orthodox Church quickly reacted to the deep social needs and in times of poverty, discrimination, individualization, and loosening of the relation between persons and peoples, the Orthodox Church, in fidelity to its mission, has intensified charity and solidarity at the level of parish communities, and yet more through the social infrastructure it has developed. By so doing, it has confirmed its status as a reliable partner in the articulation and implementation of a social policy meant to alleviate the many sufferings caused by the economic turbulences, especially amongst

the most vulnerable members of our society. Nicholas Fedorov's famous remark that "our social program is the Holy Trinity" is fully backed by Christian Orthodox anthropology, soteriology and eschatology.

This level of outreach is but one contribution the Orthodox Church can make, but we offer something further. From our vantage point, society is hurting, due largely in part to disordered relationships: with God, with ourselves; with our neighbor; with our world. Therefore, the crisis of values is not surprising. Where once European society displayed such landmark attributes as honesty, order, rigour, competency, stability, honour, and responsibility, we now find instinct, game, absonant risk, speculation, incompetency and irresponsibility. Since we are considerably more experienced with the internal, spiritual challenges facing humanity, we have identified important links between these challenges and the external struggles like financial crisis, political upheaval, and the breakdown in social cohesion so widely observed throughout the world today. The Orthodox Church is uniquely positioned in society to begin the healing of the deeper causes of our societal ills. We promote community, humility, moderation, generosity, stewardship, and most importantly a thirst for knowing Christ through deeper reflection and communion. For those who do not share our faith, we will model these attributes and promote peace and dialogue in every community and sphere of influence with which we are blessed. We fully recognize that regardless of our efforts to perfect humanity, it is not likely we can rid the world of all selfishness, carelessness, and hunger for power. However, without addressing the core of these issues, any controls put in place to cause positive financial and social outcomes will be eclipsed by new, as yet unseen malevolence. Indeed, the heart of the human is deceitful and who can know it?

This Dialogue Seminar reflects the real need to develop a think tank of experts on a community-based level for the dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and European Institutions. Furthermore, it has an added value because it can enrich the Annual High Level meeting between the Presidents of the European Institutions and the Religious Leaders, if held before that very event. It has been therefore proposed to hold such a Dialogue Seminar on a regular basis.

It is very important that CROCEU has been recognized by the BEPA as one of its strategic partners. And although it is clear that the Orthodox Churches cannot and have not such intention, to replace the EU Institutions when dealing with social issues, they can however help them to identify the necessary involvement and contribute a lot to the fight against dehumanization and atomization of our society. Just talking about values is not really helpful; there is need to articulate the existential and universal message of Christianity. This conclusion is not naïve about the challenge this ideal poses. It is, indeed, impossible to enter the heart of another and make their philosophical and lifestyle choices. However, we feel that modeling our values of moderation, humility, peace, and community-building lays the foundation

for transformational change. We are not advocating any sort of spiritual escapism, but aim to constantly keep an eye on the present, while living in the eschatological perspective of that which is still to come.

In keeping our eye on the present, we can observe that responsibility for the trials and tribulations experienced by all peoples of the earth is not so easily or neatly placed. Painful consequences follow several avenues of delivery: the original sin and fallen nature of the world, the devil; a human's desire for comfort and material gain; communities' efforts to reject or control its members; government's failure to abolish corruption; industry's lust for profit; various faith tradition's failure to adequately inspire each generation to seek good and recognize bad: "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16)." In holding leaders from every part of society responsible, we will also balance our anger by extending grace "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another (Titus 3:3)." We must live in this world, but we must never embrace worldliness in our choices. Consequently, the concept of salvation is closely linked precisely to the restoration of this lost unity, a unity which will be perfected at the end of time, but which nonetheless is being already realized now and here, in history.

In summary, the Orthodox Church offers forgiveness to all who have wronged humanity through selfish, individualistic, and greedy choices. We have missed the mark in the past, are suffering as a result today, but look to the future as we represent our hope for the future in these meetings. Our desire is to see all people loved unselfishly, treated justly, and walking in peace. Recommendations that seek to merely restrain certain behaviors or compel others will likely be limited in effect if not combined with an understanding of the underlying cause of our problems: the spiritual condition of humanity in this fallen world. The approach must embrace a holistic perspective on the human person, aiming at addressing the whole diversity of one's needs, and rejecting by all means the almost universally accepted, but nevertheless artificial, separation between physical and spiritual needs. Only such an approach can have a real chance to address the current context in a serious manner, and to redress the current situation. In concert with government concern for people, Churches focus all their resources on helping those persons or groups who find themselves in the most difficult situations: low-income or unemployed and with no immediate job prospects, old and lonely, deserted by friends and family, or, on the contrary, young and energetic but with no material possibilities to acquire an education. Many of these people look to the social programs that the Church organizes with the rather limited amount of resources it has at hand. In light of our shared vision for the hurting, the Church desires to synergistically with governments in support of its mission, which is being done not outside, but within history.

As history marches forward and we ring in 2013, the European Year of Citizens, the Orthodox Church stands in solidarity with those who also choose harmony among peoples, personal reflection, thoughtful living, and laboring together to provide for the needs of the destitute and forgotten. We therefore

reinforce the message that Dialogue is the key for development; dialogue not just between civilizations but also within our own European culture and civilization; dialogue between the different pillars that support our society and that sometimes do not even recognize or acknowledge one another. May Christ illumine our way and give us the courage and wisdom to transform our world.

In closing, we offer one again a word of gratitude to the European Commission which, through its Bureau of European Policy Advisors, has jointly organized and hosted the meeting today, as a materialization of a salutary initiative to widen its perspective on the future of the European Social Policy.

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