

Concluding thoughts

Auxiliary Bishop Leo Schwarz

Jörg Lüer

Dear Friends,

Today we are looking back at the pathway we have travelled together over the past three years. They were three good years. Three years characterised by the will and the ability of the Commissions to work together. Three years during which we were able to intensify our cooperation and at the same time get to know one another better. My impression is that our mutual efforts have been worthwhile. We certainly have not brought about any miracles. Without a doubt our contributions have not fundamentally changed the world, not fundamentally changed Europe. Yet, we have made progress. Fortunately we were able to welcome the Commissions from Serbia, Lithuania and Romania officially to the Conference in the past three years. The dialogue between East and West has been strengthened, not least due to the extensive support from Renovabis. It is a small contribution to overcoming the division of Europe.

We have not withdrawn into our self-contained shell. Instead, we have attempted to mature and to face the challenges of Europeanisation anew.

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions is the network of national Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe.

Our experience in recent years has confirmed that the national Commissions and their will to cooperate are the true wealth of the Conference. By exchanging our gifts in a very practical way, we are contributing to the renewal of Europe, which is so urgently needed. From the perspective of the presidency, this is a very tangible matter. ExCo sessions, meetings of the Secretaries General, the International Workshop and the General Assembly would not be possible without the active cooperation of the national Commissions. In the past years, we have had the privilege to enjoy manifold hospitality and encouragement, sometimes also helpful

criticism. In the face of all the differences between us, one experience has been connective, and it appears to get at the heart of the European project: the willingness to open up to one another, to respectfully deal with the sometimes tense dissimilarities and to not give up seeking ways for cooperation.

The European Conference promotes dialogue, meetings and mutual understanding among European Justice and Peace Commissions and local churches, and thus sets the stage for successful European unification.

The experiences that we have been able to gather on this way are encouraging, to mention only the meetings in Berlin, Belfast, Verdun, Kyiv, Palermo and, today, in Belgrade. Experience has shown that in all modesty we can make a valuable contribution, and we can only make it together. Church action for peace is not impassive preaching of doctrines. It gains its shape, its credibility and its strength from us coming to face with the realities and the people affected by them in as concrete a manner as possible. During the Exposure in Albania, we were able to see for ourselves that the option for the poor is no romantic illusion, but that it inalienably belongs to us.

It was therefore certainly not a mistake that we made use of the experiences of the Conference and decided to further develop the mode of our meetings. Real encounters, deliberately set in a symbolic context, are a form of contemporary political communication, are one way for us to develop and spread our message. It seems to us however that we have not yet fully exhausted the potential of this method. The same applies to the spiritual dimension of our work. Many spiritual communities, for instance the Brothers in Taizé and the Carmelite Sisters in Berlin, have kindly and repeatedly supported our work with their prayers. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the special ministration of prayer is far too often neglected. Prayer and the divine service – not seen as bothersome duties – take us into the horizon of His will. For, if at all, it is in this way that we are instruments of His peace.

We make a contribution to a united, free and just Europe. We are committed to the unification process in Europe, as this is the greatest political peace project in European history. It is especially important for us to contribute towards helping

Europe to embrace its responsibility arising from the past and from the present, especially for the countries of the South. We have strengthened and deepened our European bonds in recent years. We believe that this was important and necessary. In future, however, it will also be important to more strongly involve the experiences of other world regions in our work. I am certain that the different approaches to globalisation in Europe can be enriching for us all. It makes a difference whether our view of the South is seen through the prism of our own colonial history, or through the perspective of the experience of transformation. We would be well advised to take these differences seriously. It is crucial to resist both the risks of making excessive demands on one another and of false self-sufficiency. With the Concerted Actions we have found a form in which diversity and joint action hang in a very fruitful balance. We have always experienced the Actions as inspiring and enabling. This particularly applies to the Concerted Action for Poverty Reduction. We have no reason to sing songs of triumph, and yet there is also no reason to be downhearted. The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions has proven that it is a learning community and that it is capable of joint testimony. This is a reason to be joyful.

Do however allow us to also take on a more contemplative tone. On looking back, we have encountered a number of temptations which the individual Commissions and the Conference as a whole ought to resist, and which in most cases they have resisted.

First temptation – Retreating into doctrines

In view of the abundance and the complexity of tasks, and at the same time of our recognisably limited resources, it is occasionally enticing to simply fall back on the Catholic social doctrines. You cannot go wrong. Yet it is unfortunately not very helpful if they fall on deaf ears. Doctrines require concrete testimony. Credibility and thus the willingness to listen arise only from concrete action, even if it is of symbolic nature.

Second temptation – Europe only as a bolster for national interests

Europe is hard work and challenges all of us to repeated and renewed change. The success of the European project stands or falls with our willingness to develop our own potentials in a dialogue with others' potentials. It lives on the belief that we can

only truly grasp ourselves through dialogue. Europe offers the exciting context for such cooperative development. However, in politics – and yet also sometimes in the Church – we observe again and again that attempts are made to misuse Europe to strengthen national interests. Such attempts are doomed to failure from the start as the short-term successes are out of all proportion to the long-term damage.

Third temptation – Europe is the “others”

Europe often seems far away. European cooperation requires effort and sometimes even asks too much of us. It is naturally tempting to retreat into one’s own national context. Europe seems like an additional task that has to be done; certainly important, but not so important right now. “Hold the fort; I’ll ride out for supplies.” “It doesn’t offer me much in my own context.” European cooperation is only successful when the participants involve themselves and help to shape the joint project.

Fourth temptation – Escaping into excessive European rhetoric

Europe has no lack of big talk. The more difficult the situation is, the greater the pathos. As wonderful as great speeches about Europe can sometimes be, in the long run only patient work will help us. It is not invocations, but pragmatic solidarity that will light the way. Modesty and at the same time fearlessness in the face of the challenges are what is needed.

We are well advised to keep these things in mind in future, as well. We can be confident that this will succeed. But we must not fool ourselves: regardless of the encouraging experiences, JP Europe is still weak. It is still the case that only the large and financially strong Commissions are able to take up the presidency. We discussed this problem, which has been brought up so often in the past, in detail in Verdun and Kyiv. We agreed that in the medium and long term, we need a Permanent Secretariat. This is the only way that we can ensure continuity and quality alongside the highest possible participation by the national Commissions. This is the only way that we can really face the challenges of Europeanisation and globalisation as reliable partners. Founding the association as a legal structure was only the first step. We still need to set up the Permanent Secretariat. We can only reach this goal if, within the scope of their possibilities, all of the Commissions support the French presidency on this pathway. Europe is a team sport. We can be glad that the French

stars will be leading the team in the coming years. Yet even the greatest stars become sad and ineffective if they don't have the support of the team. We would therefore like to expressly advocate active support for our successors. We are extremely thankful to now be able to place the work of the presidency in French hands. It is a good feeling to pass on the staff with a smile.

Thank you very much and God's blessings