



Committee of Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union

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COMMUNIQUE

ON THE ONGOING CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

“He who closes his ear to the cry of the weak
will himself cry out and will not be heard.”
(Proverbs 21,13)

Over the past few weeks we have all been facing an increasingly challenging time: the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has caused death and suffering to many Europeans and has brought our society to a previously unimaginable standstill, that is now more-and-more likely to bear heavy and long-lasting effects on each and every aspect our lives.

We, CROCEU members¹, would first of all like to express *our sincere condolences to the families who have lost their loved-ones, as well as to extend our wholehearted wishes for a speedy recovery to all those who have been infected* and are currently fighting the virus.

Furthermore, we seize this opportunity to express *our gratitude to all those* in the health care systems, social workers and others carrying out essential roles for the functioning of our society, *who selflessly put their health and wellbeing at risk in order to provide care and relief to us all*. It is precisely in these acts that we find just as many concrete expressions of an attitude *and* conduct of real **solidarity** that should in fact guide us all: persons, institutions and - all the more - States. For the EU and its Member States, *this is a critical occasion to prove that the* always and univocally cherished and much talked about *principle of European solidarity is more than a mere rhetorical exercise*. It is a time when *such words are to be incarnated into the daily lives and many-faceted struggles of each and every European citizen, with special regard to those who find themselves most at risk* – people living in poverty, the marginalized and refugees. **We pray for, and call on, European leaders and citizens alike not to miss this chance**, by closing their hearts and their borders, and turning their back to the States and people who currently find themselves in the greatest distress.

¹ Established in 2010, the *Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Institutions* (CROCEU) brings together the representatives in Brussels of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Bulgaria, the Church of Cyprus and the Church of Greece. Its main goal is to articulate with a common voice the concerns and the perspectives of the Orthodox Church on EU-related matters.

While supportive of *the strict*, though at times painful, *measures that state authorities throughout Europe had to impose* to slow down the spread of the new virus and thus to hopefully minimize human casualties, we equally feel the need to stress the need for these measures *to be taken and implemented in a well thought and balanced manner*, that would adequately *serve the need to uphold and protect public health*, but *equally do justice to other fundamental human rights* so central to the long-held European standards, not least respect for private life, religious freedom and freedom of movement and assembly.

Yet, no less important, this time could – and should – also serve as an opportunity for each of us to reflect on, question and possibly amend our principles and outlooks, our outer manifestations and most-inner convictions – our very lives. Confined as we are into our homes, we might (re)discover *our inner selves, as well as the beauty and value of family life*. Obligated to impose limits on our buying behaviour, we could (re)discover *the difference between needs and wants* and thus alter our over-consumeristic behaviour. Unable to meet, hug and share time with our loved ones, we might (re)discover *our longing and inner desire for inter-personal communion and love* – a mirroring, for us Christians, of the tri-personal God Who has created us in His image and likeness. Not least, unable to partake into the sacramental life of the Church, and especially so into the Divine Liturgy, we could (re)discover anew, with greater awareness and genuine humbleness, *the invaluable gift of everlasting life* that God is so generously offering us.

As we prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter in a way different from what we are used to, we ask our Lord Jesus Christ to enlighten and guide our scientists, health workers and political leaders to find a speedy and auspicious solution to the current crisis. We also pray that our Lord helps all families to become a haven of peace in this time of trouble and disarray. We express our faith that *He who is the source of life by trampling down death by death will eventually cast out fear and will give joy to His creation*.