

## Our New Common Europe – Conference 2017



At the end of 2017, a major international conference was held again. On December 14, Sapientia College of Theology gave a keynote speech entitled “Our New Common Europe.” The topicality and interest in the subject was indicated by the fact that nearly two hundred people had pre-registered for the event. The discourse that started in 2016, clarifying the analysis and seeking remedies, continued again at the international level. As well as those by the Hungarian speakers - His Eminence Dr. Péter Erdő cardinal primate, Zsolt Semjén, Deputy Prime Minister, and György Hölvényi, EEP Member of the European Parliament - the speeches delivered by the foreign participants were also of great interest. The panel discussion following the presentations was attended by Olivier Poquillon, a Dominican monk, Secretary General of the Committee of Episcopal Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), former Dutch government member Gábor Dzsingisz, current Christian Democrat MP and Frank Spengler, head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Hungary.

In his opening speech, József Mészáros, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Barankovics István Foundation, when explaining the goals of the conference, observed that we did not have a reassuring and meaningful answer to what it means to be a Christian democrat today. Valid answers were born in the age of Rerum Novarum, as in the post-World War II Europe, when the European Union was built on Christian democratic principles. Today, however, there is a renewed need to evaluate the situation,

to formulate new, valid Christian democratic answers, and to clarify how Christianity can contribute to the future of Europe.



In his presentation, Péter Erdő pointed out, among other things, that the 20th century history had left a lasting impact on the societies of Central and Eastern Europe. After 1989, the West set out expectations, for which the social preconditions were lacking. “Many in this region felt that they were being treated as backward, possibly uncultured, and even guilty because of a situation that was not the fault of these peoples, but of the political decisions of the great powers after the Yalta Convention.” In his speech, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén started from the premise that “Christianity has built the cathedral of European civilisation”. Therefore, the protection of Europe cannot be based on anything other than the protection of Christian civilisation, sovereign nation-states, and traditional values - what the founding fathers dreamed of - when the European Union was founded. According to the Deputy Prime Minister’s diagnosis, “the current bureaucracy in Brussels is an apple that has fallen very far from the tree of the founding fathers.” Among other things, he pointed out some important characteristic approaches in our region as well as the policy of the Hungarian government, contrasted with the ways of thinking at the centre of the EU. Indeed, neither its Christian roots nor the fact that the continent is a “Europe of nations” can be separated from the essence of Europe, that is to say, he concluded, “the European form of existence is the nation-state”. He emphasized that the Hungarian government is pro-EU, insofar as “the European Union is a tool for the survival of the Hungarians (...) Everything is good that points in this direction and everything that

goes against it is bad.” He stressed that European culture is the totality of the culture of nations and not the denial of national cultures.



György Hölvényi, a member of the European People’s Party and co-organiser of the conference, said that if we want to give our children the chance to be European, our most important task is to update Robert Schuman’s well-known dictum: “Europe will be Christian, or it will cease to exist.” He went on to take a culturally critical view of the state of Europe, touching on migration, the drawbacks of consumer society, the media’s greater influence on our thinking, and said, “To become a community of values, Europe must rediscover the values of its past.”

Frank Spengler, head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Hungary, spoke about the great challenges of the age, to which Christian democracy must find answers in order to put a compass in the hands of the people. Among the questions facing Christian democracy to be answered were the rise in social inequalities, the growing political confrontations in the wake of the financial crisis, the aging of European societies, the break-up of families, the expected consequences of the African population explosion, the proliferation of artificial intelligence and its effect on the job market as well as the global persecution of Christians. According to the speaker, the three basic values should be held in common. The most important task is to convey Christian values to future generations and to present morally superior examples, such as those represented by Konrad Adenauer.

The Dominican monk Olivier Poquillon, Secretary-General of the Committee of Episcopal Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), assumed that the goal of the European Union was to ensure peace. In a Europe that was previously plagued by wars, the Union made Christ's message come true: "Love thy neighbour!" The EU institutions have a *raison d'être* only when they serve the people. Human rights are not a left-wing issue, but derive above all from the principle of human dignity. European citizens have the responsibility to shape Christian democracy and politics as active citizens themselves.

In his speech, Gábor Dzsingisz, a former Dutch government member and current Christian Democrat MP, who has been a member of Dutch Christian democracy for fifty years, identified five areas where it is an urgent task to find answers that are based on Christian ethics. Curbing the unbridled power of capital and growing social segregation, which threatens a social explosion and is a breeding ground for populism. "For a Christian democratic politician, a situation in which 8% of the world's population owns over 85% of earthly goods is completely unacceptable," he noted. Thirdly, he proposed a "humane but rational approach" to the challenge posed by migration, which should be based on a clear separation between the migration and the refugee issues. "Those who are truly persecuted have a place among us and always will," he said, but those seeking a livelihood in Europe must be supported in their own country. It is also a current task to curb climate change because it is our duty to preserve the created world. Finally, he urged rapid intervention to curb polluted communication, especially false, uncontrollable, misleading information, and fake news.

Analysis of the Barankovics István Foundation's conference in Budapest convinced the participants that Christian democracy, like any other political ideology in Europe, must act. As the President of the Foundation, József Mészáros, concluded that Christianity itself is a global idea, "it is not possible to find a local answer in a global world", therefore the same questions must be asked in each country. The conference, even if eventual solutions were not found, raised important questions, and that is half the battle. István Elmer edited a volume from the speeches delivered at the conference entitled "Our New, Common Europe through Christian Democratic Eyes", which was published in 2018 by BIA.