

THE ATHENS AFFIRMATION

WE, A GROUP OF CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS FROM VARIOUS NATIONS, TRADITIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND CHURCHES IN EUROPE, PARTICIPATING IN THE STATE OF EUROPE FORUM IN ATHENS, ON EUROPE DAY, MAY 9, 2014,

- **AFFIRMING** that the message of hope proclaimed by Paul on Mars Hill two thousand years ago, of the God in whom 'we live and move and have our being' and of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, continues to offer hope for Europeans everywhere today, hope for every sphere of life affected by sin, including politics, economics and society, and hope for a sustainable future of freedom, solidarity, equality and peace;
 - **ACKNOWLEDGING** that Robert Schuman's vision for a 'community of peoples deeply rooted in basic Christian values' and the founding father's conviction that Europe could not remain merely 'an economic and technical enterprise' but needed a soul, remain guiding perspectives which we neglect to our peril, as evidenced in the current economic, political, social, religious and environmental crises; perspectives that lay behind the Schuman Declaration made this day sixty-four years ago giving birth to what is now the European Union;
 - **REMINDING** ourselves of our responsibility to help shape the spiritual character and values of Europe, aware that 'issues challenging European union and true community today, such as racism, nationalism, the rise of Islam, the influx of refugees, and the environment, can only be sufficiently responded to from a biblical perspective, which transcends race, nation and culture, offers a secure hope allowing for tolerance to rival worldviews, calls God's people to hospitality and compassion, and requires wise stewardship of earth's resources', as expressed in the Brussels Affirmation of 1992*;
 - **EMPATHISING** with the peoples of Greece and elsewhere in southern Europe suffering hardships daily due to an economic crisis with spiritual and relational roots, where job prospects for youth are bleak and families, businesses and institutions struggle increasingly to meet financial obligations, and who carry the brunt of increasing numbers of migrants and refugees, the 'have-nots' and the persecuted from Africa and the Middle East particularly, seeking a better life in Europe;
1. **CALL** for a unity of heart essential for the church to exercise moral authority to promote solidarity and community among the peoples and nations of Europe, what Schuman called the 'spirit of Europe'; for continued repentance and forgiveness among Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant leaders, recognizing that: historical ecclesiastical schisms continue to feed social, political and economic tensions, including the present Ukrainian crisis; that biblical solidarity goes beyond healthy patriotic caring for our own communities of family and fatherland to include the other; as the Good Samaritan parable reminds us; that nationalism is a pathological overemphasis of the nation, the antithesis of true patriotism; that economic and political globalization demands the globalization of solidarity, a sense of mutual responsibility, particularly for weaker nations; and propose that churches promote reconciliation at personal and local levels, in societies characterised by suspicion and bitterness, by for example holding an annual Day of Forgiveness, appealing to all to forgive one another's past wrongs;
 2. **URGE** entrepreneurs, financiers, politicians and policy makers to recognize the opportunity crisis brings to reshape priorities, and to promote an economy based on the relational principles of '*No reward without responsibility, no investment without involvement, no profit without participation*'; to encourage a macro-economic shift towards a debt free economy; to help families suffering under the financial crisis to escape from personal and household debt by offering practical guidance and to renegotiate personal debts; to promote concrete steps such as converting mortgage debt to shared equity ownership structures; to discourage companies through the tax system from using debt finance (bonds and bank loans), and to use more equity finance; and for church leaders to address issues of corruption and tax avoidance by promoting Christian teaching of ethics and proposing such initiatives as a Day of Debt-Forgiveness (i.e. where unpaid tax obligations be partially forgiven given a commitment to pay taxes going forward); and to help ignite the Greek virtue of *filotimo* to bring hope to the wider society.
 3. **APPEAL** to church and government leaders to work hand-in-hand towards more liveable environments in the home countries of migrants and refugees while also ensuring that the Dublin III Regulation is interpreted and applied to protect the dignity and human rights of refugees, with fair asylum procedures and decent reception conditions; while committing ourselves to welcome strangers, refugees and the internally displaced, treating them as we would like to be treated, and to challenge others to do the same;
 4. **SEEK** to strengthen democracy locally, nationally and Europe-wide, recognising our duty to contribute to the divinely-ordained purpose of the community, the call for incessant prayer for our leaders, as well as the threats to democracy of special interest lobby groups (corporate and civil), a shrinking middle-class, far-right populism, inequality and political corruption; by stepping out of our comfort zones to lead by example, seeking out respectful dialogue with those of different persuasions; engaging debate based on content and reason, avoiding emotion and polarization; working together with all relevant actors; by stimulating citizen's initiatives and empowering political engagement at all levels, especially for young people, and by prioritizing our activities strategically for maximum 'salt and light' influence; encouraging open and transparent government, and thus fostering faith in democratic systems;
 5. **ENTREAT** believers of all backgrounds actively to support and implement Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which affirms that all human beings rightfully have full freedom of conscience within limits necessary for a democratic society and the well being of others; to defend the rights of others to freedoms we desire for ourselves, to pray for authorities, the well-being of our diverse societies and wise and just use of the law, while understanding that loyalty to God is higher than loyalty to any man-made authority; by courageously advocating and protesting our beliefs to people in power; and by participating in a day of fasting and prayer for freedom of conscience for all; also to remind governments of their accountability, and not operate beyond the limits of their sphere, by interfering in theological matters; to accept the God-given right for every human being to freedom of religion and belief; to treat all people with justice, equality and truth regardless of faith, including in our criticism or disagreement with the faiths themselves, to engage in constructive dialogue with them, and to implement a day of freedom of conscience with associated awareness-raising packs for schools;
 6. **RESOLVE** to respond to the Ukraine crisis by recognising that non-relational approaches tend towards power confrontations and escalation, economically, politically and militarily; but that a relational response would seek dialogue and conversation, promote diplomacy, research for facts, search for common ground and a bottom-up consensus, avoid media interference, aim to rebuild trust over time, include appropriate religious actors and seek a long term constitutional settlement, considering the possible option of a federal state;
 7. **COMMIT** to live our lives, arrange our priorities and distribute our resources according to these affirmations, and to challenge others, including leaders of our faith, political and social communities, to do the same, by God's grace. ❖

* <http://www.stateofeuropeforum.eu/the-1992-brussels-affirmation/>