COMECE: “Interreligious youth dialogue strengthens democracy in Europe”

Brussels (Belgium), 24.09.2019

Young people of different faiths gathered at COMECE on Tuesday 24 September 2019 to discuss the contribution of interreligious youth exchanges in strengthening and building trust in democracy in the EU.

The event, co-organised by COMECE and the Bavarian Youth Council (Bayerischer Jugendraad, BJR), focused on “Dialogue for Democracy” (Dialog für Demokratie) a youth project established by the Bavarian Youth Council in 2016 to overcome prejudices, build trust and friendship, and set the ground for a sustainable dialogue in Bavaria, Germany.

During the debate at lunchtime at COMECE, young people shared their experiences and debated with EU representatives on the possibility of this initiative becoming a reference point at regional, national and EU level.

“This project embraces dialogue, democracy, interfaith and young people, four elements of fundamental importance for the present and the future of the European Union. Society demands from all of us, persons of different faiths, to work together on tackling climate change and preserving the environment – stated Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of COMECE, during his welcome address to the participants.

Bert Van Caelenberg, Secretary General of Eurofedop, attended the debate.

Markus Vennewald, Policy Advisor for Social & Economic Affairs, Secretary of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission.
Fr. Barrios Prieto also highlighted Pope Francis’ call “to promote a culture of dialogue in these times of polarisation and great societal challenges” and expressed appreciation for the recent EU initiative “European Youth Dialogue”.

This event is one of the many initiatives carried out by COMECE to work together with and listen to young people’s concerns in order “to allow them to fulfill their dreams and aspirations in their local communities”, as stated at the October 2018 Youth Synod in the Vatican by the President of COMECE, H. Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ.

One of the speakers was Jan Olbrycht, Member of the European Parliament (EPP, Poland), co-chairman of the EPP working group on intercultural relations and interreligious dialogue. Mr Olbrycht, Doctor of Sociology, former member of Solidarność and mayor of Cieszyn (Upper Silesia) from 1990 to 1998, underlined that it is necessary that we build trust. Not only do we have to listen to youth, but we also have to ask them to share with us their preoccupations so that we may understand them.