

Press Release – October 29, 2017

## **Europe, a promise of peace**

*A meeting at the Vatican to rethink about Europe*

*«In our time, Christians are called to revitalize Europe and to revive its conscience, not by occupying spaces, but by generating processes capable of awakening new energies in society». Pope Francis said these words at the end of his address to the 350 participants, present at the Vatican for a meeting sponsored by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (Comece) in collaboration with the Secretary of State. The title was "(Re) thinking Europe – a Christian contribution to the Future of the European Project" (27 -29 October 2017). This conference was meant to create an opportunity where one could discuss the contribution Christians can give to the European project, with the hope that dialogue put into practice can be of help to Europe and its institutions at this very critical stage.*

During meetings held in previous days, Cardinal Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Freising and President of Comece, gave a picture of the continent's realities, perspectives, challenges and hopes. He spoke of issues, such as environment, work, refugee crisis, that have to be faced *"with a very clear vision of our present, and above all of the future"*

Msgr Jorge Ortiga, Archbishop of Braga and delegate for the Portuguese Bishops' Conference said, *"the European Union needs a soul, it needs something new. This is not the case of just considering the territory or the economy; but it is the responsibility of building one society, one body that expresses diversity, respect for every culture, every country with its different characteristics"*

András Fejerdy, professor at the Catholic University of Budapest said: *"Even if the Berlin Wall fell 25 years ago, divisions in our minds still exist. Maybe, we who live in the eastern part of Europe know the history, culture and thought of the Westerners better. On the other hand, we face many misunderstandings because of lack of knowledge. I participated in a workshop with representatives from the East and South of Europe, and it was interesting to see that we all share the same hopes and fears about the future of Europe".*

Katrien Verhegge, director general of *Kind en Gezin*, in Belgium, said: *«It is in this context that we promote our message of unity and diversity. For me this means going back to what is essential: love and the golden rule. We can unite ourselves in living the golden rule, "in not doing unto others what we would not have others do unto us". If we start to live this in our rethinking about Europe, we will already be making a step forward".*

For Pedro Vaz Patto, president of the Portuguese Peace and Justice Commission, this is actually a moment *"of crisis of confidence in Europe. As Christians, we have tried to contribute towards a Europe in search of a soul. The EU motto is "unity in diversity". We Christians believe in God, who is one and who is Trinity. So our faith helps to live this unity in diversity, first of all through our witness. Among Christian Movements, Churches, individuals".*

Ilona Toth, Focolare Movement's delegate for *Together for Europe* was among the participants. *Together for Europe* brings together more than 300 Christian Communities and Movements spread across the Continent. While preserving their independence, these collectively form a network to pursue shared goals, each contributing through its own specific charism. Toth said that: *"The Together for Europe Project is very much in line with what was discussed during this conference and many showed interest in it. We have been invited to Brussels to start work of collaboration, while envisaging the importance of empowering Europe's peoples to build their history"*.

At the end of his address, Pope Francis said that the commitment of Christians in Europe *"must represent a promise of peace"* and that *"it is not the time to dig trenches, but to work courageously to realize the founding father's dream of a united and harmonious Europe, a community of peoples who wish to share a future of development and peace"*.

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