

Press Release – March 21, 2017

European Christians and Citizens

On March 24, 2017, the eve of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome, a Prayer Vigil by Christian Communities and Movements that form part of the network "Together for Europe".

The Italian capital city will be at the centre of celebrations that commemorate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome. This historic agreement gave birth to the European experience of integration, which today involves more than half the states of the continent. In recent years, the road taken to achieve the European project has given rise to doubts and insecurities, empowering intolerance and closure. This is the scenario for Heads of State or Government and Presidents of the EU institutions who will come together for the Rome Summit on this occasion. On March 24, the eve of the anniversary, they will be received by Pope Francis.

Among the many initiatives planned to commemorate this historic event, there will be an ecumenical prayer vigil held on March 24, at 19.30 at the Basilica of the Holy Apostles, near the Capitol, in Rome. This is being organized by "Together for Europe", and the speakers will be Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity; Bishop Nunzio Galantino, secretary-general of the Italian Episcopal Conference; Andrea Riccardi, historian and founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio and Gerhard Pross, who is presently the moderator for "Together for Europe". An Orthodox choir and a choir set up for the occasion by Movements and Communities of "Together for Europe" in Rome will animate the celebration. Prayer vigils with the same objective will be held in another 34 European cities, from Lisbon to Szeged, from Brussels to Matera.

The aim of this initiative is to witness that relationships of communion, reconciliation and unity are possible among the peoples of the European continent. This is demonstrated also by the progress achieved since after the war through unprecedented realities, that have contributed towards peace, vision of a common destiny and prosperity. "Together for Europe", a network of over 300 Christian Communities and Movements, spread all over the continent and belonging to different Churches, is also a witness of this. These Communities and Movements, so varied in cultures, languages and regions, establish relationships in which full respect of mutual diversity is maintained, while they pursue shared goals, each bringing a contribution specific to its charism. Among them, there is the Focolare Movement, who has been one of the promoters of "Together for Europe" since its very beginning.

This is a witness of Christian living and of life in European society at the same time, and those involved in this experience want to contribute to the ongoing debate on the future of the continent. During a conference organized by the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Focolare Movement, Pasquale Ferrara, the Italian ambassador to Algeria, claimed that today rather than speaking about its Christian roots, Europe should produce "*Christian fruits*". And he presented "*the golden rule, which invites us to do unto others what we would want others to do unto us*" as an answer to the solution. Ferrara insisted that this rule "*is not only of ethical value, but that it also assumes a political dimension, because it makes one think about the nature and the collective qualities of the political community*"¹.

"Together for Europe" appears to be one of the subjects that can interpret this dimension while inspiring and motivating people of different generations and communities, coming from different European countries, to incarnate the values of justice, hospitality and peace in everyday life. This contributes towards sustaining that "*Europe family of peoples, that is capable of giving birth to a new humanism based on three capacities: the capacity to integrate, the capacity for dialogue and the capacity to generate*"², which Pope Francis spoke about when he was awarded the Charlemagne Prize.

Victoria Gómez (+39) 335 7003675 – Benjamim Ferreira (+39) 348 4754063

¹ «Europe, which identity, which values» Geneva, Aprile 21, 2016.

² Vatican City, May 6, 2016.