



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Presentation of the COMECE report on Europe's Vocation to Promote Peace in the World

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Dear Brigadier General,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union, founded as a project of peace and reconciliation, has been surrounded by a series of conflicts and violent crisis in recent months at its Eastern and Southern borders. Peace and security have faced serious threats even on the European continent itself, including in this city. Political instability, failing state structures, spread of violent extremism, increasing economic inequality and social injustice in many parts of the world as well as the emergence of hybrid threats have significantly contributed to worsening of the security situation in our neighbourhood and worldwide.

In an environment marked by these worrying signs, the European Union has recognised as one of its most urgent tasks to elaborate a Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy in order to provide strategic guidance to its External Action whose efficiency has often been hampered by lacking unity and insufficient coordination between Member States and various institutional actors. The Bishops of COMECE welcomed this step and see this as an opportunity to reiterate the importance of reviving EU's commitment to maintaining peace and promoting it in the wider world.

There are a number of encouraging signs and a variety of already existing tools that show the potential the European Union can build on. The project of European integration has made an important contribution to the advancement of peace and reconciliation on the European continent through the instruments of its Enlargement Policy. Recently, thanks to mediation efforts of the EU High Representative, considerable progress has been achieved in reaching a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis. At a more global level, the European Union has been playing a leading role in the fight over climate change, it is the world's largest trading bloc and, together with its Member States, the EU has contributed to more than half of the world's development and humanitarian aid.

The present report on Europe's vocation to promote peace in the world has been adopted by the COMECE Bishops as their contribution to the preparation of the Global Strategy. After an initial look at the signs of the current time, the report strives to provide reflections for orientation and recommendations for action in order to assist the European Union to fully live up to its vocation for peace.

The report is based on the Church's broad understanding of peace. In this sense, peace is "not merely the absence of war" (Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*) but peacebuilding above all requires the establishment of an order governed by the principles of "truth, justice, charity and freedom" (Pope John XXIII, *Pacem In Terris*). It is a dynamic process characterised by ceaseless efforts aimed at transforming the violent manifestations of conflicts into ways in which they can be addressed by non-violent means. In the words of Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium*), conflicts must be made a link in the chain of a new process with a view to building communion, since "unity is greater than conflict".

The European Union is a unique actor on the world stage with a variety of policy instruments, internal and external. It has not only a legal commitment arising from the Treaties (cf. Art 21 Treaty on European Union) but also a moral responsibility "not to close in on itself" but to contribute to "building a more just and fraternal world" and "to building peace within its borders and throughout the world" (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*).

The European Union should therefore develop an authentic European Peace policy. It should join up its wide-ranging policy instruments and direct them towards the overall and guiding objective of just peace on the basis of its founding values. Especially the founding values of the EU can provide that unifying element which could help to overcome the divisions between Member States and institutional actors and thus create greater policy coherence and consistency with a view to serving the European and global common good.

The report suggests that such an authentic European Peace policy could be built around three pillars: Pre-emptive peacebuilding, Peace through Justice and Peace through Security.

In the first place, a policy of pre-emptive peacebuilding should be adopted with a set of forward-looking and broad-based actions. Pre-emptive peacebuilding requires stepping in at a very early stage where the seeds of a potentially violent conflict can be transformed and managed in a sustainable way, thus preventing future use of force from a long-term perspective. Such an active non-violence policy approach is especially needed in preventing the threat of fundamentalist terrorism, which besides reactive security measures above all requires addressing the deeper social, political and religious roots of radicalisation of particularly young people. By strengthening the tools of peace diplomacy and fostering mediation efforts to reach political settlements of conflicts, the European Union could also make an important contribution to easing the plight of migrants and refugees.

Another key element of pre-emptive peacebuilding and prevention of future conflicts is post-conflict management. In this context, the European Union can play a supportive role in contributing to re-building effective state structures and creating just living conditions in crisis-affected regions. Since the damage caused by violent conflicts is not only material but also psychological and moral, the long-term process of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness must be an integral part of the transformation process to a peaceful society.

For the Magisterium of the Church, peace is "an enterprise of justice", and thus a second pillar of the European Peace policy should be based on the premise of achieving peace through the means of justice. This implies the adoption of an integral concept of security, often also referred to as human security, which considers human, socio-economic and environmental development as essential drivers of peace.

In the area of human justice, the European Union must be an active promoter of human rights through a coherent use of all its internal and external policy instruments.

Development assistance and cooperation can be one of the major tools for promoting socio-economic justice. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the European Union should pursue a policy of sustainable development which not merely seeks to provide aid, but aims at truly empowering third-countries and their inhabitants to become agents of their own development. In this respect it is equally important that the policy of international trade maintains policy coherence without conceding on human rights and values, and becomes an instrument to assist developing countries to gradually integrate themselves into the world economy.

The promotion of environmental justice should be another essential ingredient in EU's peacebuilding efforts. This does not only include keeping the ecological commitments following the adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement, but above all helping people in affected regions, particularly in poor countries, to adequately respond to natural disasters and mitigate their consequences. The questions of energy security and energy efficiency will also need to be addressed in this respect.

As part of the comprehensive approach, the third pillar of an authentic peace policy comprises achieving peace through security. The Social Teaching of the Church regards every war as "a defeat for humanity" and requires very strict conditions on any resort to military force. Nevertheless, "as long as the danger of war persists", the right to a lawful self-defence cannot be denied. For such a case it is also legitimate to possess adequate means in compliance with the principle of sufficiency. The recent calls for a more effective bundling of defence capabilities and deepening the common security and defence dimension of the European project, which according to studies could avoid duplications and lead to significant savings as regards military spending, deserve a further careful assessment. Particular attention, however, should be paid to ensure that this does not reinforce an armament dynamic in Europe and worldwide. Therefore, an overall disarmament strategy, including nuclear disarmament, with a view to systematically reducing the military arsenals in Europe and worldwide should be an integral part of the Common Security and Defence Policy. Another important challenge in this respect constitute the gaps in arms export control, which call for more effective and coherent regulatory frameworks at European and international levels as well as their proper implementation.

Finally, as many of the challenges to peace are global and require a global approach, there is a need for an effective "global governance" and "a true world political authority". The EU should promote a comprehensive reform of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to enhance regional representation in the pursuit of the common good.

The Catholic Church with its worldwide networks and a broad societal outreach, often in ecumenical cooperation, can make a unique contribution to EU's peacebuilding mission, be it in the area of conflict prevention, reconciliation or the provision of development and humanitarian aid.

It is our hope that the present report will be of assistance to the policy makers as they prepare the final series of recommendations on peace and security to the upcoming European Council which – as we hope - will endorse a robust and ambitious Global Strategy providing a good basis for an authentic European Peace Policy. We wish that the report may also foster the debate with civil society and become a point of reference for the wider public.

Thank you.