

**To the member bishops of COMECE**

Olivier Poquillon OP  
General Secretary  
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the  
European Community (COMECE)  
Square de Meeûs, 19/1  
1050 Brussels  
Belgium

23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2017

Your Eminence,  
Your Excellencies,

as members of the Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE) we would like to assure our support for the upcoming conference in Rome “(Re)thinking Europe” prepared by the Holy See and Comece.

The European idea is facing various serious challenges – at national and international level. As engaged Christians we wish to contribute to the forthcoming discussion on the occasion of the Rome conference, through the attached short discussion paper. We would be pleased if these suggestions contribute to your reflection and might be taken into consideration during the conference.

We thank you very much for considering our concerns.

Faithfully yours,

***Members of the Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE):***

*María del Carmen Aragonés*, Spain, Teresian Association

*Peter Annegarn*, Belgium, President of the European forum of national laity committees

*Boris Bartho*, Slovakia

*Skaidrite Gutmane*, Latvia, Latvian Christian Academy

*Janko Korošec*, Slovenia, Socialna akademija

*María Luisa Lladó Hädinger*, Spain

*F. Martin Maier sj*, Belgium, Jesuit European Social Centre

*Dr. Mary McHugh*, United Kingdom, Chair of Andante, European Alliance of Catholic women's organizations

*Petr Mucha*, Czech Republic, Czech Christian Academy

*Adela Muchová*, Czech Republic, Czech Christian Academy

*Théo Peporté*, Luxembourg

*Dr. Neven Šimac*, Croatia, President of the Centre for European Documentation and Research R. Schuman, Split

*Pedro Sols Lucia*, Spain

*Dr. Stefan Vesper*, Germany, Secretary-General of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK)

*Drs. Marie Louise van Wijk-van de Ven*, Netherlands, Andante, European Alliance of Catholic women's organizations, Unie NKV

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**Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE)**

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Riga, 23<sup>th</sup> of October 2017



## **Elements for the discussion of the Conference “(Re)thinking Europe”**

As *Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE)*, a European Christian working group that has among its objectives to encourage reflection about the process of European unification, we welcome the initiative for the upcoming Conference “(Re)thinking Europe” convened by Pope Francis together with COMECE taking place from 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2017 in Rome.

Given that the EU is entering obviously in a new phase of its development, we hope that the encounter of Rome could be the start of a process turning into a permanent dialogue, offering beyond day to day politics, the possibility of thinking together how to design a sense for our common future.

From our most recent meeting in Riga, where we have been discussing the future of Europe, listening to each other and praying together, we wish to point out some main aspects for the question of Christian contributions to the future of the European project.

- We can witness the depth and seriousness of the centrifugal tensions in Europe, reflected notably by the quest for independence in Catalonia, the Brexit decision, the growing dissatisfaction and nationalist preferences displayed in some outcomes of recent elections. Even if those tensions take various forms, they point out common challenges: a loss of confidence in current policy making, a feeling of lack of justice, an inward looking response to the perceived threat from globalization. We, as Christians are called to understand them and to identify the adequate answers, rooted in the “first and biggest commandment” and in the Christian social teaching. We wish however to draw your attention on a number of citizen’s initiatives aiming at building bridges and bringing hope. The encouragement and support from the Bishops would greatly contribute to strengthening them.
- Many politicians on national level are using the European Union to raise their popularity by blaming it for national ills. This irresponsible scapegoating strengthens nationalistic and centrifugal tendencies in Europe and diverts attention from the real issues and their resolution. However the European institutions, including the national authorities, have together a great responsibility in clarifying who does what, becoming accountable on European issues that have often become confusing.

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- The immense challenge of a European approach to migration and to the new trends in the inflow of asylum seekers should be definitely on the agenda of the upcoming Rome Conference. Because it is at the heart of the tensions and also urges the EU to be steward to its founding values. It is a difficult but unescapable task for politicians to look at those new trends as a permanent character of the future of Europe and of its Nations. They must present to the citizens a comprehensive and sustainable response based on the human rights and make them confident on how it should be taken up in the long run. Our local Churches have certainly a very important role to play in this respect, in encouraging the citizens to building upon their own Christian identity and to engaging in fruitful dialogue and assistance, opening then new avenues for the future.
- We are the first generation taking advantage of the initiative of the founding fathers of the EU. But we are not acting with this heritage in a responsible way. We are responsible for the future of our common Europe. Many young people are thinking as European. They are growing up with open borders, speaking English as the main connecting language. However many of them are not content with a narrow “economic“ vision and expect from the EU a broader perspective. Similarly, the young generation praises the diversity of national cultures, religions and beliefs. A new and more differentiated approach is needed for political integration, which should be done in an inclusive way where the identity of Europe will still be based upon welcoming its diversity.
- Contrary to what had been expected a decade ago, in spite of a progressing economic convergence, a social convergence between eastern and western Europe is not really taking place. Even worse, democratic values are perceived quite differently making political dialogue sometimes almost impossible. It is therefore important to considering European politics not only in the form of common rules and institutions, but also as a process of cooperation which brings together the peoples, their regions, cities and their various cultural settings. Catholic local churches across the EU should help to improve and deepen a process of mutual intercultural recognition.

*The Initiative Christians for Europe (IXE) is an association of lay organisations and committed Christians from various European countries. The common concern of IXE is to incorporate a more vivid awareness of a united Europe in the national debates. The initiative aims at fostering the encounter of Christians in Europe and to promote the Social Teaching of the Church to be carried forward in order to achieve a better mutual knowledge and understanding of historical and cultural differences.*

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