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Common values – the living source of the European project

A contribution of the COMECE Bishops to the preparation of the Berlin Declaration

1. As Europe prepares to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome on 25 March 2007 we, the Bishops of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), express our gratitude for the achievements of the European project. Together with many people, however, we discern a need for all EU citizens to assume responsibility for the European project. The European Union needs to be built on a firm community of values. The Berlin Declaration offers a unique opportunity for the Heads of State and Government as well as for the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Parliament to set out the values they share and the ambition to make these values real.
2. The European Communities were built on the ruins of World War II. During the following decades further countries joined the Communities in successive accession rounds. It should be underlined that some took this step after liberating themselves from dictatorship or after having contributed to the implosion of the totalitarian soviet system. For many of its founders the Christian imprint on the European project has been an indisputable fact.¹ On this basis they engaged in the European project with the ambition to bring peace to the continent, to overcome the division of Europe and to promote the well-being of its people. This ambition was deeply rooted in a set of common values with respect for human dignity at its core. This respect of human dignity served as the basis for promoting the protection of human rights, the rule of law, solidarity, subsidiarity and democracy. These values correspond to Catholic social teaching which, too, is built on human dignity and the common good. As the process of European integration has evolved, these values and ambitions have further concretised around the concept of a community of rights. In the context of new challenges, they will need to be refined.
3. Formulating the values and ambitions of the European Union today is a demanding task:
 - The people in the European Union are facing new and transnational challenges: How to promote social justice and sustainable economic growth in the era of globalisation? How to maintain decent living conditions and job security in times of rising unemployment and impoverishment? How to restore and promote family and community life under the conditions of drastic demographic changes? EU citizens expect ethical and effective policy responses to mass migration, shortage of energy supply, climate change and international terrorism. Furthermore they feel that the European Union should accept its responsibility for resolving

¹ Cf. Paul-Henri Spaak, Speech at the Chamber of Representatives, Belgium, 13 May 1957: „I believe that it is a historical fact, that we must not contest, and this affirmation comes from a man – I repeat once again – who is not catholic, not even a believer and who claims absolutely no merit for it. But I cannot fail to register the fact that this western civilisation was born a little bit before Jesus Christ in Greece, that it has been confirmed by Christ's teaching and that it is based upon something essential, something which, if we adopt it, contains in itself an incalculable number of consequences. It is that this Christian civilisation was made to human measure, was based on this essential idea of respect for the human person.”

international conflicts and promoting global development. The EU leaders will have to prove that these challenges can only be tackled by putting our common values into practice and developing concrete ambitions. The European Union may be part of the problems of globalisation; it must be part of the solution. The Berlin Declaration should reiterate that the European project serves the human person, the protection of life and its integral development.

- Today, many EU citizens do not see sufficient reason to identify with and engage in the European project. This project cannot remain, however, an undertaking of a small European elite. Fifty years after the Treaties of Rome the European project will only succeed if the people of Europe develop both an appreciation for the European Union and a sense of active citizenship. The Berlin Declaration offers an opportunity to explain to EU citizens which values inspire and guide this project and which ambitions it pursues. If the EU leaders convey to the people a sense that they are promoters of, and beneficiaries in, a project which has made a historical and qualitative difference to their lives, they will foster European identity. And if people see that EU Institutions have improved their consultation methods and have become more transparent, this should contribute to a deepening sense of active citizenship.
 - The European project has an ethical basis, and this precedes political union. This ethical foundation derives from the origins and sources of our common values and ambitions. These historical origins are to be found in the Christian and humanistic heritage of our continent.² Moreover, for a majority of EU citizens their Christian faith is the living source for their support of our common values and ambitions. The Berlin Declaration, therefore, should be inclusive enough not only to list the values and ambitions of the European Union but to reflect the religious and humanistic motivation of EU citizenship. Thus it needs to take account of the transcendental destiny of the human person.³
4. In their preparation of the Berlin Declaration the EU leaders and the EU citizens need to be aware of serious threats to the European project and its values:
- In view of the current challenges some politicians and citizens in EU Member States favour a re-nationalisation of important policies. Such a shift to different national approaches would disregard the transnational character of these challenges and thus fail to develop the necessary instruments to tackle them. Furthermore it would prevent the values and ambitions of the European Union from being put into practice in the current context. However, the undeniable diversity of the European peoples has to be respected.
 - A misreading of the urgent need to respond to the transnational challenges would impede the development of the European Union. In view of the pressing problems the European Union cannot continue “business as usual”. This would cause a delay in achieving agreement on our ambitions and the subsequent development of appropriate policy measures. The European Union would have to pay a high price for such a delay.

² Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the new Ambassador of Austria to the Holy See, 18 September 2006: “Lastly, it is always a matter of the identity and spiritual foundations on which the European community of States and peoples rests. Neither a more or less effective economic union nor a bureaucratic body of norms that regulates coexistence can ever fully satisfy people’s expectations of Europe. Rather, the deeper sources of a solid and stable European “togetherness” lay in the common convictions and values of the Continent’s Christian and humanistic history and tradition. Without an authentic community of values it is, in the end, impossible to build the reliable community of rights which people expect.”

³ Cf. Pope John XXIII, *Encyclical Pacem in terris*, 11 April 1963, paragraph 45: “When society is formed on a basis of rights and duties, men have an immediate grasp of spiritual and intellectual values, and have no difficulty in understanding what is meant by truth, justice, charity and freedom. They become, moreover, conscious of being members of such a society. And that is not all. Inspired by such principles, they attain to a better knowledge of the true God—a personal God transcending human nature.”

- Peace in Europe is too often taken for granted. The conflicts on our continent and in neighbouring parts of the world show that a peaceful state of affairs may easily be undone. Peace, its maintenance and promotion, must be perceived as a permanent ambition. The Berlin Declaration can make an important contribution to ensuring that the European project will remain a synonym for promoting sustainable peace – both peace within the European Union resulting from new forms of solidarity through political, economic and social co-operation and peace abroad through the European Union's further contribution to global development and conflict resolution.
5. When commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, the European Union will consist of 27 Member States. Important institutional questions – how to bring the EU citizens closer to the EU institutions, how to organise policy-making in an enlarged European Union and how to develop the European Union into a stabilising factor for the globalised world – still remain to be resolved. If we want to continue to make our values real and to pursue our ambitions, we need to develop a more democratic, efficient and transparent European Union. All politicians, citizens and institutions active in European society are called upon to work for a new political and legal framework on our continent which lives up to the needs and wishes of the people and serves the common good of Europe and the world. We trust that the Berlin Declaration can lay the foundation to achieve this framework.

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