



Commission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
Kommission der Bischofskonferenzen der Europäischen Gemeinschaft

Solidarity is the soul of the European Union

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Statement by the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community

1. This statement has been prepared in view of the accession of ten new Member States to the European Union and the – still ongoing – process of adopting a new constitutional treaty. It is addressed to the political authorities, to the European public, and to all Europeans. At this turning point in the history of the EU, marked by enlargement and constitutional reform, we believe that the common European interest should prevail over national interests and should determine our actions to a greater extent in the future. Giving precedence to the common interest in issues of vital common concern has proven its value as an organisational principle for the EU, just as practical solidarity in a community whose membership has grown over the years has proved possible and has paid dividends for both donors and recipients.

For Christians, solidarity is an expression of their faith. As a spiritual attitude rooted in a theology of Creation, solidarity springs from an awareness of mutual dependence. It is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all responsible for all."¹ It guides our actions: sharing, helping, renouncing, sacrificing, sympathising. It includes respecting the differences and differing fortunes of different peoples as well as the recognition of regained national dignity. It is the way in which people and human communities who know they are linked to one another treat people while taking others into account. "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 40).

2. The European Union is about more than just binding together states and peoples. Individuals are more and more being directly involved in unification. Only this can create a community of solidarity and give European unification its soul, enabling people to accept it in their hearts and minds. With this declaration, we, the Bishops of COMECE, call for solidarity to be applied more widely and more deeply in the European Union. Solidarity is one of the basic missions of the Union, and the goal of economic development is subordinate to it. For us solidarity is primary among the values referred to in Article 1-2 of the constitutional treaty drafted by the European Convention².

At the same time, we recognise the concern that the term ‘solidarity’ is sometimes misused to assert individual interests. Furthermore, we should like to avoid the misunderstanding that all conceivable types of solidarity must have their European equivalent. No European law or programme can replace the solidarity of a

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On social concerns), no. 38

² "The values on which the Union is founded are respect of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and the protection of human rights; these values are common to all Member States in a society distinguished by pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination." (Article 1-2)

family or good neighbourly relations. European lawmakers cannot legislate peaceful coexistence among religious denominations and religions or hospitality among faith communities. A slowly emerging European consciousness will not render regional allegiance obsolete. Forms of solidarity whose emergence are very closely associated with the achievements of the modern nation state do not need to be “Europeanised” in the foreseeable future.

3. The first section of our statement presents solidarity as a constitutive part of the current treaties on which the Union is founded and examines it in the light of the Church’s social teaching. In the second section, we then discuss the need to expand solidarity in the EU, which can perhaps only be achieved if a group of states takes the first step in the framework of the existing treaties and European institutions. From our perspective, it is necessary above all to ensure that other EU countries can also move closer to and join this group at a later stage. In the second section, we also call for an extension of solidarity with countries and regions of the world that are not part of the EU. The third section addresses solidarity in an EU of 25 Member States, in which it will have to take real form in a new financial framework for the period after 2006. The EU’s new medium-term multi-annual financial framework will be the touchstone with regard to how the greater economic and social inequality in the enlarged Union can be countered.

**Solidarity is an abiding theme in the Union’s treaties –
reflections in the light of Catholic social teaching**

4. The Treaty on European Union (TEU) describes the EU’s task as being to organise, in a manner demonstrating consistency and solidarity, relations between the Member States and between their peoples (TEU, Article 1). The Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC), which has been revised repeatedly since 1957, defines the Community’s task as the promotion of solidarity among the Member States (TEC, Article 2). Chapter IV of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is entitled “Solidarity”. It lists fundamental rights in the areas of working life, health care, social security, access to services of general economic interest, and environmental and consumer protection. In the new draft constitutional treaty, the European Convention has established solidarity as a key value in Article I-2.
5. Solidarity is defined in our introduction as being inter alia the decision to provide assistance out of an awareness of being linked to others. Pope John Paul II’s 1987 encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*The Social Concern of the Church*) sets out the tasks as follows: “Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. For their part and in the same spirit of solidarity, those who are weaker, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others.” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 39) What is said here about persons should also apply by analogy to the Member States of the European Union. Solidarity is also an

appeal to one's own responsibility. The application of another fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching, subsidiarity, challenges each of us to examine what one can achieve by one's own efforts and provides us with a motive for self-examination.

6. Nonetheless, a series of questions arise with regard to solidarity among EU Member States. How should we respond to the rich member states, whose citizens already consider the tax burden they have to carry so great that their governments do not dare ask them to make any further sacrifices, especially for European initiatives? How should we treat European regions that have been able to achieve little progress despite long-standing assistance? How can we continue to help the middle group of EU Member States to achieve its goals, without casting doubt on the priority we attribute to the economically weakest states in accordance with the concern for the poor in Catholic social teaching? How can we promote a more economical and more responsible management of EU finances and work to oppose the temptation of corruption?

Catholic social teaching offers some guidelines for answering these questions. Solidarity involves more than just balancing material interests. It presupposes a particular awareness of interdependence and must lead to a Union that assumes responsibility for managing material assets in a spirit of neighbourly love. We Europeans can turn to our common Christian heritage to help us. Our hope is that a good balance between union and the undeniable interrelation of the life of the region is achieved.

7. Solidarity becomes effective when people are aware that they belong together and that they are bound together by bonds of friendship. In the words of the aforementioned encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: "The exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognise one another as persons." (no. 39) As parties to the treaty, the EU Member States recognise that they belong together. This includes lasting respect for common institutions and a higher legal order. By agreeing to their accession the present fifteen Member States have embraced in solidarity the ten new States.
8. This new belonging together is not based solely on economic or geographical factors. Religion and culture are at the heart of Europe's sense of unity. They nourish the process of integration. In his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, Pope John Paul II observed: "Modern Europe . . . draws its values from its Christian heritage. More than a geographical area, Europe can be described as a primarily cultural and historical concept, which denotes a reality born as a continent thanks also to the unifying force of Christianity, which has been capable of integrating peoples and cultures among themselves, and which is intimately linked to the whole of European culture. . . . The European Union continues to expand. All peoples who share its same fundamental heritage have a vocation to take part in it, on a short-term or a long-term basis."³ We are conscious that there are also dark aspects to this heritage. Yet we are convinced that the forces within it can be made effective in a positive manner.
9. However, the awareness of cultural unity that emerges from our Christian heritage does not imply immediately and for all membership in a political Union. For

³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 108, 110.

this, the necessary awareness must – as the history of European integration shows – grow over a period of years. It is therefore only wise to give those Member States that are not ready more time for further steps towards integration.

10. Solidarity cannot be measured only in terms of the transfer of funds in the EU. Such transfers are always the expression of an underlying political attitude. “Spiritual goods” are also objects of solidarity as much as material ones.⁴ These include exchanges of gifts in the cultural and spiritual spheres, benevolent curiosity about other cultures and customs, the desire for friendship and recognition of different histories. It is particularly important to revive this in a Europe that today attributes such great importance to material values. And yet while the EU can recognise such spiritual goods and promote their exchange, it cannot produce them itself. That is the task of others, and in many ways the Churches also service society in this respect. Solidarity is also an obligation for each individual. It requires a watchful eye and a helping hand in order to bring relief from misery and distress.
11. The EU budget is mostly funded from contributions by the Member States and not on revenues from a general European tax. As long as this remains the case, it makes sense and is consistent with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity that the EU Council of Ministers decides by unanimity on the amount of such contributions. Each Member State must have a full right of co-decision regarding its contribution to the EU budget. All Member States must agree to a new financial framework for the European Union.

**On solidarity within a political union and the responsibility
of the EU towards other countries and regions of the world**

12. It is to be expected that not all the Member States will be able to achieve the declared goals of a political union at the same time. Abandoning this goal would, however, rob the Union of its guiding principle. From its beginnings, it has been a structure that has developed as a result of both external and internal impetuses. This has been demonstrated again by the most recent round of accessions. Expansion without the force of internal development would result in the loss of durability and lead finally to degeneration. A newly emerging and more complex sense of mutual dependence should not therefore weaken the search for solidarity. On the contrary, the new sense of union should lead to a renewed sense of solidarity.
13. Looking ahead, it is clear that further political union can only emerge with a greater degree of solidarity. This evidently cannot be expected from all EU Member States at the present time. They are, however, all subject to the requirements that arise from the creation of the ever-growing internal market. The Union’s historically unprecedented enlargement to 25 states will result in even greater tasks of solidarity

⁴ Cf. Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: “Whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and material, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God’s providence, for the benefit of others.” (no.19)

to be resolved. On the other hand, continuing integration towards political union requires a qualitative leap, implying a much more demanding kind of solidarity. Are all Member States able and willing to make this leap now?

14. The dynamics of day-to-day politics do not, however, meet this challenge. There is no direct path from the solidarity of the internal market to that of political union. Even monetary union, which implies a higher degree of solidarity, does not necessarily lead to full political union. The peoples involved will have to take significant and far-reaching decisions to achieve this. This can, no doubt, only be expected from them all when profound concerns for their own survival arise, for example when one core of the political union influences the others and where the states can only hope to preserve their own identities by forming a political union. One of the few historical examples of such unity is the political union of the Dutch provinces, sealed by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1579. Article I of this treaty states that everyone shall support each another with life, goods and blood.
15. A group of States may only lead the way and put to the test more extensive forms of political, military, economic or social co-operation if it sees itself as a magnet and does not exclude others. Being true to the European spirit of community requires being open to the future and being open to all. In the same spirit such a group should work within the framework of the existing treaties and be based on the European institutions. The group must not shirk responsibility for the further development of the others.
16. As a power influencing the world economy, the European Union has universal obligations. It must conduct its relations in a way that takes account of its responsibility and increased ability to exert influence. This requires specific forms of cooperation with its immediate neighbours to the East and South. Article I-56⁵ of the Convention's draft creates a sound contractual basis for this, which must be implemented over the coming years. By enlarging this area, the cultural and religious differences in the neighbouring countries will become more important. These will affect the feeling of solidarity among the public at large in one way or another.
17. Furthermore, the European Union has a duty towards the poorest countries and regions in the world: "We who are strong ought to bear with the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15: 1). The European Union has resolved to increase its level of aid to 0.39% of gross national product by 2006. Alongside negotiations on a new EU financial framework for the period after 2006, a plan should also be developed to achieve the internationally agreed goal of 0.7%. However, development aid alone is not sufficient. Since the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has not yet made definitive progress, further efforts are needed in trade policy, particularly to give the poorest countries a fair chance to develop by opening up European markets: "It is a very important duty of the advanced nations to help the developing nations in discharging their above-mentioned responsibilities. They should therefore gladly carry out on their own home front those spiritual and material readjustments that are required for the realisation of this universal co-operation."⁶ This appeal by the

⁵ "The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring States, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation." (Article I-56 Paragraph 1)

⁶ Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 86b. cf. also Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* 45 – 65.

Second Vatican Council has not lost any of its currency even forty years after its publication. The international community of States has set 2015 as the deadline for reaching a series of development goals⁷. To achieve this, many of the poorest countries must themselves clearly make an important contribution by establishing transparent governmental and administrative structures. The European Union nevertheless has a moral duty, which it may not avoid by referring to increased internal obligations.

Expanding solidarity in the Union of 25: the EU budget after 2007

18. Economic disparity will be greater in the Union of 25 and cultural diversity richer. This implies a double challenge. In order to counteract disturbances in the ever-growing common market and to promote cultural diversity, the use of existing budgetary resources must be assessed and – if necessary – used in a more purposeful manner before one starts to think about additional resources. The budget of the European Union will in any case have to be larger in future in order to react to increased inequalities by increasing redistribution whilst dealing with greater mobilisation of growth in the internal market. As previously, this will be done via medium-term multi-annual financial planning, providing the political framework for a number of years in which each annual budget can then be adopted with less conflict. The EU budget is fundamentally different from the budgets of the individual Member States. This is due to the EU's unique system of integration, for which the model of a State with a high degree of centralisation would be inappropriate. The draft constitution adopted by the European Convention provides in Article 1-3 for the EU to promote "economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among the Member States". The redistribution necessary to achieve this must be supported by fundamental democratic consensus. Even with the current limits of 1.24% of gross national product on revenues, the EU budget still has room for manoeuvre in the

⁷ The Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations in September 2000 marks the beginning of a new global partnership for development and defined eight international development objectives, known as the Millennium Development Goals:

1. Halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015: Halving the proportion of people with an income of less than US\$ 1 per day and the number of people suffering from hunger by 2015 (based on the year 1990)
2. Realisation of general primary education: Facilitating primary education for all children in the world by 2015
3. Promoting gender equality and the position of women: Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 as far as possible and at all levels of education by 2015
4. Lowering infant mortality: Lowering the mortality rate for children under 5 years of age by two thirds by 2015 (based on the year 1990)
5. Improving the health of mothers: Lowering mortality in childbirth by three quarters thirds by 2015 (based on the year 1990)
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other serious diseases: Containing HIV/AIDS, malaria and other serious diseases by 2015
7. Securing ecological sustainability: Incorporation of the principles of sustainable development into individual state policies and programmes as well as reversing the loss of environmental resources; halving the number of people with no access to hygienic drinking water by 2015
8. Establishing a global development partnership

organisation of its financial resources. The European Parliament also assumes the function of controlling the use of these resources in a democratic manner.

19. On the impetus of its President, Romano Prodi, the European Commission adopted a helpful initiative in February 2004 to establish the Union's tasks more precisely from 2007 onwards. This will give concerned citizens a clearer overview of the resources with which the Union hopes to fulfil the tasks assigned to it. It is hoped that the Commission's proposal will contribute to the formulation of a good compromise between old and new Member States with regard to the EU's finances. We regret however that the Commission's initiative did not focus more on promoting contact between Europeans and increased cultural exchanges, since the success of initiatives like the ERASMUS programme clearly point in this direction.
20. Qualitative and quantitative decisions have been taken in favour of one economic sector and profession: agriculture. The European Council established upper limits for expenditure on agriculture from the EU budget until the year 2013 at its meeting in Brussels in October 2002. At the same time, the most recent reform of EU agricultural policy represents a further reorientation of EU resources towards the development of rural areas⁸.
21. Another important element of EU spending is assistance for disadvantaged regions. This manifests the material solidarity among EU States. It is therefore of primary importance to adjust them to the enlarged European Union. Here too, certain key values have already been agreed. The proportion of the gross national product of the EU to be devoted to regional assistance should be around 0.5%. According to experts, an analysis of the situation of the individual regions in need suggests that the natural limit to the capacity of recipient regions to absorb EU aid would amount to about 4% of a region's gross national product. The administrative and planning authorities of a region or country can hardly be expected to absorb resources above this limit. Regional assistance should be dynamic and lead to regions developing their own initiatives.
22. Solidarity with future generations must also be expressed in the new EU financial framework. This includes, for example, an EU research policy that facilitates technological progress and innovation whilst promoting human dignity and uncompromising respect for human life. A public financial policy that avoids deficits and, in particular, excessive debts also serves to promote solidarity with future generations.
23. As mentioned above, solidarity also extends to spiritual goods. It is not confined to material aspects but encompasses all dimensions of the human being. In addition to the issues of the EU budget and the transfer of material goods, and even beyond standing up for justice and peace, we therefore encourage the political decision-makers to think about how an enlarged EU can together remember those who died in the European wars as well as the victims of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.

⁸ With regard to the reform of EU agricultural policy, see COMECE statements "Towards sustainable agriculture in Europe" (29.11.02) and "The crisis and its consequences" (30.03.01).

Towards a new solidarity

24. Solidarity cannot be achieved by legal provisions and know-how alone. But without the will to further and strengthen solidarity, the Union will lose its purpose. It will drift away from its origin, from the Declaration of Robert Schuman inspired by Jean Monnet. The idea that sparked this text was the securing of peace through co-operation based on solidarity and establishing a legal and economic order promoting peace. By this measure, the paths that lie before us in the years ahead may appear difficult. The political leaders of today are, however, bound by the obligations arising from the historical direction marked out at that time and supported by over half a century of experience. The strength to resolve the ongoing constitutional debate also springs from this source. The unanimous adoption of a new financial framework for the Union for the period after 2006 will be an important test of solidarity. In this, the new demands for solidarity in an enlarged internal market come together as in a burning glass. At the same time, the Union is struggling with even more far-reaching goals. It could be in everyone's interest if a group of Member States could reach an agreement within the framework of the existing treaties and institutions on the steps toward a political union in order to test whether this would better serve peace in Europe and the world at large. A twofold solidarity is always required: openness to future demands and responsibility for all.
25. In view of these challenging tasks, we recall the words of Pope Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, still a path-finding document for today: "When a society is perishing, the wholesome advice to give to those who would restore it is to call it to the principles from which it sprang; for the purpose and perfection of an association is to aim at and to attain that for which it is formed, and its efforts should be put in motion and inspired by the end and object which originally gave it being. Hence, to fall away from its primal constitution implies disease; to go back to it, recovery" (no. 22). Europe has lifted itself out of the decline and disasters of the first half of the 20th century with a new form of living for each other.

In the beginning, solidarity was the way to make peace. Serving solidarity is the most important legacy that Europe owes itself and the world. Solidarity exercised within the Union and beyond its borders is the soul of the European Union.

Santiago de Compostela, 24 April 2004

- + Josef Homeyer, *Germany, COMECE President*
- + Adrianus van Luyn, *The Netherlands, Vice-President*
- + Hippolyte Simon, *France, Vice-President*
- + John Crowley, *England and Wales*
- + Josef De Kesel, *Belgium*
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