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

Statement by the COMECE Presidium on the current situation in the European Union

14 June 2005

The will expressed by the people of France and the Netherlands has put in question the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty and created a critical situation for the European Union. However, this event does not signify the end of European construction. A crisis can become an opportunity.

After the catastrophe of the Second World War, the European Union became the foundation of peace in Europe, for well being and solidarity between the nations. Recalling this is a source for optimism, particularly today. After 1989, the EU became, for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, a source of hope for their free development. A continent united in peace that serves the good of its citizens and the people of the whole world remains the mission and the obligation of all those who are politically responsible in Europe.

The history of European integration is characterised by repeated phases of hesitation and re-orientation on the way to achieving the common good. Now, we enter into a period of reflection on the next stages of this common way for the peoples and the States of Europe in which all citizens, in particular politicians and the media are called to engage. It is important to find a balance between national identity and the European common good. Only by sharing sovereignty in a Union of peoples and States can national identities be maintained and promoted. Also in this way can a response to the challenges to globalisation be given and the fears of the citizens relating to the loss of political control and power be taken away. Subsidiarity and solidarity are vectors for the future of Europe.

A clear lesson can be drawn from the referenda in two of the founding states: the citizens have stated that in its current situation, the EU does not live up to their expectations. The citizen must be at the centre of European politics. The human being is the bearer, inspirer and aim of all society's institutions. European politics must relearn to think for and take the human being as its starting point. The Members of Parliament and Governments, most particularly the members of the European Council which gathers on the 16 and 17 June for an important meeting in Brussels, have the duty to pay attention to the preoccupations of the citizens in matters of unemployment, insecurity and social

injustice. The States of the EU must respond to the expectations and hopes, anxieties and problems of the citizen as members of a closely linked community.

They must also find solutions for improving the functioning of a European Union of twenty-five Member States. Making the structures more democratic and transparent is imperative. We need a more coherent and consistent application of the principle of subsidiarity in Europe. To recognise the prevalent will of the citizens for action and to adjust all actions taken by the Member States and the European Union to that and to the common good, would bring a new legitimacy to the European Union. This is essential in order for it to remain a Union of solidarity and peace within its borders, and for the whole world. Conversely, the challenges which do not find a solution at the national level demand a European response.

The European project will stay on the right path if the people, and more particularly the young, learn not only of their own national history and tradition but equally that of others. This is the precondition for more consideration and mutual respect between small and large, old and new Member States. In the future, the consciousness of the historic identity of Europe and of its shared cultural and religious heritage must be taken into account more strongly in order to facilitate citizens identification with the European project and thus to engender a more authentic community of European values.

We call upon all Catholics to engage themselves for the common European good. Experience shows that far from it just being an economic and political construction, the European Union relies upon its spiritual, intellectual and cultural orientations. This responsibility does not only rest on those who are politically responsible. It depends upon the engagement of everyone. For this reason we continue to encourage all the initiatives in parishes, dioceses and movements which favour better mutual knowledge through twinning, pilgrimages and exchanges of all kinds.

We invite all those who are politically responsible to revitalise and pursue the spirit and commitments of the founders of the European Union.

Bishop Em. Josef Homeyer, Bishop of Hildesheim, Germany (President)
Archbishop Hippolyte Simon, Archbishop of Clermont, France (Vice-President)
Bishop Adrianus van Luyn SDB, Bishop of Rotterdam, The Netherlands (Vice-President)