



**Speech of H. Em. Card. Hollerich, President of COMECE
on the occasion of the launch of the COMECE Youth Net**

Good afternoon to all of you and **thank you**, young delegates, for being present at the launch of the COMECE Youth Net. It is great seeing you gathered here, although only online, to be part of this new COMECE initiative dedicated to you.

I would state the obvious if I said that young people are important for the future, which is indeed true. However, I firmly believe that youth is not only important in view of tomorrow, but it is essential **today!** And therefore, we must listen to and engage with young people at all levels.

2022, as you may know, has been dedicated by the EU institutions to young people. The idea of a **European Year of Youth** was born because the institutions wanted to focus on those citizens, who, because of the pandemic, could not fully live in a normal setting **two years of their young life**: students could not fully attend school or university, children could not see their grandparents and many could not find a job, or worse, lost it, due to lockdowns and restrictions.

Pope Francis always has a preference for young people. Way before the pandemic, in 2019, among the first commitments of the **Global Compact for Education**, he called all to *listen to children, adolescents and young people*, urging youth to make their voices heard. Most recently, at the Economy of Francesco in Assisi, he repeated his demand for youth to **make noise**, because young people have every right to have their say on what concerns their present and their future.

Again, in His message to the participants of the **EU Youth Conference in Prague** last July, Pope Francis asked young people to be *open to acceptance*, to *care for the Common Home*, to *look for meaning and Truth* and to *be generative of ideas, visions and new lives*. In sum: to make Europe a land of peace, freedom and dignity. I invite you to read (or read again) His speech, which is a testimony of how close young Europeans are to the heart of the Pope and the of the Church.

But **how to make one's voice heard?** There are a lot of occasions to do so: in your community and in your country, as well as in your Bishops' Conference or diocese. An important way to do so, as you know, is through **the Synod** that we are celebrating in the whole Church. At the EU level, until last May, one of the greatest democratic exercises just ended: I am referring to the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. I am happy to see some of you here, who have also participated in the two Catholic Youth Conventions on the Future of Europe organised by COMECE this year and in 2021.

I am very convinced that we have to listen to all, in particular to **young** Europeans and, **most importantly, to the vulnerable** and those who cannot afford a dignified life in Europe and beyond. It also becomes your task to ensure that the voices of the most disadvantaged are heard in your communities, at the workplace, in your university and through your initiatives. We should work with **all generations**, young and old: without a true intergenerational solidarity, we cannot promote and achieve a dignified and socially fair present and future for all our brothers and sisters.

The idea of the COMECE Youth Net came about because we, as delegated Bishops, would like to listen more to **you** and ask **you** to give us **your** perspective on Europe, so that we can truly work intergenerationally and as one Church. After the two Conventions on the Future of Europe, we thought it was high time to make dialogue with young people from the Bishops' Conferences a structured feature of our work. We should strive to **walk the path of dialogue together**, as one, just like the **Synod on Synodality** calls for. With open eyes, open ears, and an open heart.

It is the same concept repeated by President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen in her speech on the State of the Union last month: "we need to **enshrine solidarity between generations** in our Treaties, make it a hallmark of our work in the European Union".

I would also like to say that you, as young, engaged Catholics, are most needed in the context of the **war in Ukraine**. As the Pope mentioned, if the world was ruled by young people, there would be less conflicts, because who would risk throwing away the life they have ahead?

To conclude, I want to ask you the following:

First, I urge you to **make the COMECE Youth Net a place of true fraternity**, where the message of *Fratelli Tutti* becomes concrete, and bridges for a culture of dialogue can be built. It can set an example on how, through faith, we can be brothers and sisters, aware of our unique cultural identities, truly united in diversity!

Second, I ask you to **take the talents and resources you have** and put them in the work of the Network. Your knowledge and perspective is what the EU needs to be a real project for peace and dignity for all.

Third, I ask you to make the COMECE Youth Net a **true place for solidarity**, where the commitment of every single one of you is a contribution to the work and mission of the Church and the EU, with Christ at the centre of your actions and thoughts. As St. John Bosco would say, "walk with your feet on earth, but in your heart, be in heaven."

I wish you a great afternoon, with fruitful exchanges, and I look forward to seeing some of you at the next Plenary Assembly of COMECE in 2023!