



Intervention of H. Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, SJ

EPP Group Bureau Meeting, Vienna 8 December 2022

“Keeping stability in our neighbourhood: Europe and the future of migration”

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Dear brothers and sisters,

Dear friends,

I have been kindly invited to take part in this panel session and to address the following question: “*How can we strike a balance between protecting our borders and helping those in need?*”. As you may expect from me, the starting point of my intervention will be based on the principles provided by the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching, and the orientations expressed by His Holiness Pope Francis in numerous occasions.

It is beyond any doubt that **States are entitled to control their jurisdictional territory** as enshrined in International Law, and that public authorities have a primary responsibility to take care of their communities and their citizens. This is not in dispute. However, the moral and even legal rights and obligations of

States and public authorities do not end there. **We are all part of the same human family, and all States are part of a single international community.** Our individual responsibilities and those of public authorities do not stop at the borders of their respective countries. There is an inescapable **co-responsibility towards individual people that come to us, as also towards third countries and communities that are less favoured** or hit by natural disasters or man-made crises. There is a primary individual and collective responsibility towards the people that come to our shores and lands; we have to clearly manifest an attitude of welcoming, and not of hostile rejection. Every human being is *imago Dei*, a brother and sister with an inherent dignity, that deserves a recognition as a human being, and therefore, a respectful and humane treatment, even when the law does not allow him to remain in the country of arrival. We can't permanently say "no" to those in need, those who escape from poverty or war: as a matter of principle, we should be concern about their fate, their needs, their traumatic experiences, their distress. We can't be indifferent to them. We cannot discard them or pick them up only when they represent a useful resource for our economic system. Those who are legally entitled to international protection should have fair access to the asylum system.

We must cherish our **principle of a preferential option for the poor**. We cannot turn our backs to the reality of migrants and refugees, forced to move for thousands of kilometres, through dangerous routes, and quite often subject to physical violence and even trafficking. It is true that help and assistance is not only a matter of good will but also of political and social feasibility and, not less, of resources at disposal in every country. A realistic and honest assessment of the feasibility of receiving newcomers and their families in dignified long-term conditions, but always with a generous perspective, must be made by public authorities. **Responsibility and solidarity are needed, but also generosity**. And, if finally, after this honest and genuine process of prudent discernment, public authorities conclude that they are not able to respond at a certain moment to the needs of newcomers to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated, **what should they do?** The response of **Pope Francis**, in his return from his apostolic trip to Cyprus and Greece last December to that question was: *“if a government cannot do this, it must enter into dialogue with others and let others be concerned.... The European Union is able to coordinate between all governments for the distribution of migrants (...). Immigrants are coming and there is no coordination among the countries of the European Union to send this one here, that one there, this one here ... This basic*

*coordination is missing.*¹ Partnering with EU neighbouring countries may also help people in distress looking for a better future for them and their families. This is particularly true regarding less developed countries, which are a permanent source of forced migration, due to poverty and lack of security. Our efforts to support the integral human development in these less developed countries, free of ideological agendas, should be a primary concern for us. This is a joint responsibility, but the one who has more means and possibilities, economic and social, has a higher responsibility towards those in need who come to our borders. Goods were created by God for all humankind, for all and every human being, as we are all are part of the same human family. **Europe is an area of prosperity in comparison to most of places in the world. Sharing part of our goods is not a “charitable” action but a matter of justice.** We must do it with those coming to us, but also with countries of origin or transit, where people are unable live in dignity and safety. Therefore, a cooperation with the countries of origin, transit and destination is necessary.

On the other hand, we cannot be complicit with external actors, in particular public authorities in third countries, that put migrants in unacceptable

¹ [Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Cyprus and Greece \(2-6 December 2021\), Press Conference On The Return Flight To Rome, Papal Flight, 6 December 2021:](#)

conditions and even mistreatment them, as happens **in Libya**, where torture, cruel treatment, rape and sexual abuse are commonplace. Our European countries cannot cooperate with this process of systematic dehumanization of migrants and refugees. We have a moral obligation to denounce this and to demand that these third countries' authorities treat everyone humanely, regardless of their legal status.

We must understand and take seriously the **legitimate concerns of local population in the EU**, including their fears and the distress that they feel due to what is perceived by them as “excessive” number of migrants, or as an “unbearable overburden” or a threat to the social cohesion or national identity. In this regard, truth about the reality of migration in all its dimensions, without denying its challenges, is always a better approach than hiding the impact in hosting societies, which, in any case, is generally positive. Security is an important component of social life, and potential risks and threats should be prevented and, if they happen, neutralised. **But migration is not and cannot be only or primarily portrayed as a security issue, in the same way that it cannot just be seen through purely economic lenses.** When there is a credible risk of any individual threatening the common good, a proportionate reaction is understandable and due, while respecting the human dignity of the

person. This also applies to the implementation of the criminal legislation. The State has the twofold responsibility to discourage behaviour that is harmful to human rights and the fundamental norms of civil life, and to defend the public order guaranteeing the safety of persons.² But security must be understood primarily as safety of persons, both locals and newcomers, including those in distress at sea. More than 29,000 migrants have lost their lives in crossing the Mediterranean Sea towards Europe since 2014. This is, simply, unacceptable, a scandal for human conscience, a shame for our civilization. The Mediterranean Sea, Pope Francis has insisted, has become a vast cemetery.

Fighting criminal trafficking gangs should be considered a priority, and again, cooperation with countries of origin and transit is a must to counter the ability of traffickers to readjust to changing circumstances in order to continue their profitable enslavement of vulnerable migrants and refugees. Let us be sufficiently cautious and vigilant to protect potential victims and prevent them from falling into the nets of these 21st century slavers.

Regarding the **integration of migrants**, it is generally accepted that integration should be a two way process of mutual accommodation. This does

² Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 402-3.

not mean that local culture or identity has to be set aside, diluted, abandoned or suppressed. Entering into relation with other cultures, religions or identities, should not mean to forget one's own identity, but to mutually interact enriching one another as a result of the encounter. We must not forget that cultivating a culture of encounter is part of the Christian identity. Political leaders should *“defend the centrality of the human person and ... find the right balance between the twofold moral responsibility to protect the rights of the citizens and assure assistance and acceptance to migrants”*.³

The terrible, inhuman, and unjust **war in Ukraine** makes more valid than ever the common expressed idea that “we cannot take peace for granted”. This tragedy is so geographically close to us, and unseen for decades on our beloved European continent, that it has shaken the consciences of the citizens of our countries. But in the middle of this incontestable tragedy, we see with hope how policy makers and political leaders have reacted in an unprecedented positive manner towards the more than 4 million Ukrainians looking for international protection. In doing so they have demonstrated that, willingly, legal instruments and frameworks can be put in force to provide access to the EU territory, as well as basic rights for refugees. Our responsibilities towards

³ Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (11 January 2016): AAS 108 (2016), 123.

our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in danger **should not hide or diminish our concern for other brothers and sisters**, who also need and look for refuge and protection in our countries, and are victims of other sometimes forgotten wars, or situations of violence or extreme poverty, as, for example, in Afghanistan, Syria, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Lebanon, or Venezuela, just to mention some. Nor can we be indifferent towards those who want to improve their social and economic status, coming from North-African countries or the Sub-Saharan Africa. Nobody must be left behind: every human being counts, beyond his nationality, ethnic, racial, or religious background. **The uniqueness of every person, created at the image of God, is a core belief in our Christian faith**, and must be put in value, without exception, treating each one as his or her dignity deserves. The civilization of love that we are called to build up is not compatible with discarding others, with xenophobia, discrimination, or fomenting hate, that harms the sacredness and dignity of every human life.

I would like to thank you for your efforts to find a just balance between security and human dignity, and to encourage you all to make our Europe a better place, showing that our universal principles are incarnated in our policies, in our daily lives, and aren't just rhetorical concepts. Promoting a culture of encounter

deeply embedded within our people, its most cherished convictions and its way of life, will be capable of transcending our differences and divisions.⁴

Thank you for your kind attention.

⁴ *Fratelli Tutti*, 215-6.