



*International Conference in Krakow:
Role of Christians in the Process of European Integration*

**“CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE –
WHAT EUROPE WILL BE LIKE?
WHAT POLAND WILL BE LIKE?”**

COMECE General Secretary

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Elements for Opening Remarks:

- A cordial **greeting** to all on behalf of COMECE – the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union, of which I am the Secretary General.
- **COMECE is a long-standing partner** of this Conference which offers an important space for dialogue between politics, academia, media, the Church and broader civil society on issues regarding **role of Christians in the process of European integration**.
- This year’s edition of the Conference is dedicated to a **theme that worries us all** - the on-going tragic **war in Ukraine** and its wide-ranging consequences: for the European Union, its Member States, as well as its citizens and communities, including the communities of faith.

- At an audience with **Pope Francis** in March this year, the Holy Father highlighted in his address to the Bishops of COMECE **two dreams** that he considers particularly urgent for today's Europe: the dream of **unity** and the dream of **peace**.
- Building upon the **vision of Saint John Paul II** that “*Europe is called above all to rediscover its true identity*” as a community of reconciled nations open to others, with “*creative fidelity*” to the fundamental values [cf. Saint John Paul II, Ecclesia in Europa, 109], **Pope Francis** underlines the need for a **true Europe that acts as a bridge and a peacemaker** in its neighborhood and in the world [cf. Pope Francis, Address during the Apostolic Journey to Portugal].
- At this historical juncture, when – after decades of having taken peace for granted - our Continent is once again plagued by a major violent conflict, Pope Francis asks us all to “**recover the European spirit**”, one that enables us to look beyond our own times, beyond national boundaries and immediate needs, and that generates forms of diplomacy capable of pursuing unity, and not aggravating divisions.
- In this respect, the Pope also addresses an appeal to the **Church**: her task should be **to form** people, inspired by the dream of a Europe united in the service of peace:
 - women and men that are able to **read the signs of the times** and who know how to **interpret the European project today and tomorrow**;
 - women and men that are both *architects* and *artisans of peace*;

- women and men that even in times of war, have the courage to think with the *logic of peace*, and that do not cease to seek **creative efforts for peace**.

In this sense, I am fascinated by the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: **“Something new can be born that is not discernible in the alternatives of the present”**. This way of thinking and hoping has inspired many peace processes like the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and can inspire us also today in which we are confronted with a war in our continent. We have also in mind what is happening in Nagorno-Karabakh; the dramatic exodus of the Armenians, a people which we love and are our brothers in the Christian faith and that suffered a terrible genocide at the beginning of the last century.

- Another **shared commitment** to be carried by all – politicians, academics, media representatives, religious authorities and citizens – is that of **responsible communication**.
- Communication is an **essential way to experience human fraternity** and create community, to describe our experiences, and thus to create historical memory and contribute to the understanding of events.
- And yet, in today’s fast-changing world of communications and digital systems, we are unfortunately also witnessing an **increased spread of disinformation**, twisting the truth in pursuit of certain particular interests, to influence political decisions or to advance economic goals.
- Pope Francis calls these tendencies a “tragedy” that discredits others and foments conflict, by inciting intolerant attitudes and spreading arrogance and hatred. According to the Holy Father, **the best antidotes to**

falsehoods are not strategies, but people: people who are ready to listen, who make the effort to engage in sincere dialogue so that the truth can emerge. In this way, communication becomes “*a real means of promoting goodness, generating trust, and opening the way to communion and peace*” [cf. Pope Francis, Message for World Communications Day, 24 January 2018].

- It is my hope that this year’s Conference may once again offer a **constructive and fruitful contribution** to renewing the European project of peace, helping Christians to rediscover their important role in this process of further advancing the European integration.