



Intervention of H.E. Mgr. Mariano Crociata at the Art 17 TFEU
High-level Religious Leaders meeting dedicated to the theme

“The European way of life in times of instability”

Brussels, 18 January 2024

First of all, I would like to express my greetings and my gratitude to the Vice-president Schinas as well as to the representatives of the European Commission and the Religious Leaders intervening at today’s meeting.

I will briefly share some considerations about the **impact of the crises of recent years on the European architecture and the future enlargement of the European Union**. I dare to say that the crises of the last years have also reinforced a sense of community in Europe, by helping us to realise the deep value of the European integration project and its founding values of human dignity, solidarity, unity and fraternity. The present context, especially with the tragic war being fought for nearly two years in the heart of our Continent, also seems to present an opportunity to rediscover the strategic importance of the EU enlargement process for stability, prosperity and peace in Europe. In this respect, we welcome very much the historic decisions taken by the European Council¹ at its latest December meeting concerning the opening of

¹ European Council, Conclusions of the meeting on 14-15 December 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/68967/europeancouncilconclusions-14-15-12-2023-en.pdf>.

EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, and granting Georgia the status of a candidate country.

A larger and more diverse European Union does not only require the re-thinking of certain political, administrative and budgetary questions, but it also calls for a deeper reflection on rediscovering our common value basis and the special bonds that unite us as a European family. I therefore wish to invite European policy-makers to launch such a reflection process, with contributions from religious communities as well as other stakeholders from the candidate countries.

This brings me to the second point I would like to touch upon in my intervention. Namely **the role of Churches and religious communities in addressing violent conflicts.**

In most religious traditions, peace is not merely understood as the absence of war and violence, since it requires the establishment of an order governed by the principles of justice, charity, human dignity, solidarity, and, not least, care for our common home. In our Catholic faith tradition, peace is often linked to development, *integral human development* – the development of each person, and of the whole person.

Thanks to their ‘capillary function’, Churches and religious communities - as networks of trust and hope - remain at the side of the suffering people, often the most vulnerable, during all stages of a conflict cycle. We can see this also in the conflicts unfolding in our neighbourhood.

Moreover, in the context of these violent conflicts, we can often witness dangerous phenomena, such as the instrumentalisation of religion or the spread of disinformation, societal polarisation or even radicalisation and xenophobia, that are unfortunately also gaining ground in European societies. In this respect, religions play a key role in not only condemning such actions, but also in helping to prevent and counter these threats to social cohesion.

It is encouraging to note that the European Union is becoming increasingly attentive to the specific role religious actors can play in peacebuilding and other related areas. Following up on the EU Council conclusions of 2018 on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises² that recognised the role of religious actors in preparing ‘joint conflict analysis’ in the conflict prevention (cf. para 9), the current EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024)³ stipulates that the EU should “*support interfaith dialogues and reach out to religious and faith-based actors and assess how they can be involved in the protection and promotion of human rights, in delivering the sustainable development goals, and in peace making, conflict prevention, reconciliation and mediation [...]*” (cf. para 1.3.i).

It is my hope that the European Union will also in the next institutional cycle build upon these provisions and put them into practice in a more consolidated and systematic way, as also expressed in a recent Report of the European

² Council of the European Union, Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises, 22 January 2018, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5413-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

³ The European External Action Service, EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2020-2024.pdf.

Parliament⁴, highlighting opportunities of engaging with local faith-based actors.

Let me conclude by quoting the late Jacques Delors, a key figure for the involvement of Churches and religious communities in the construction of the European peace project, who said that “*we will not succeed in Europe solely on the basis of legal expertise or economic know-how. [...] If in the next ten years we haven’t managed to give a soul to Europe, to give it spirituality and meaning, the game will be up. This is why I want to relaunch the intellectual and spiritual debate on Europe. I invite Churches to actively participate in it.*”⁵

I believe that today the message of Jacques Delors remains equally important. Thank you for your attention.

⁴ European Parliament, Resolution of 13 December 2023 on EU development cooperation to enhance access to education and training in developing countries, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0466_EN.html .

⁵ Lucian N. Leustean, *Representing Religion in the European Union*, Routledge, 2012, p. 4.