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# Letter to The European Union

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in the framework of the 2024 European Day**

Dearest European Union,

To address you as a friend is quite unusual. It feels close, though we have grown up with you. You are our “Europe,” comprising 27 countries and 450 million inhabitants who have freely chosen to build the Union that you have become together. This is absolutely wonderful! Instead of fighting or ignoring each other, we have decided to get to know each other and to get along together! We are aware that it is not always easy, but how crucial it has been to work together and to pull down barriers and defense walls instead of putting them up. You are our home, our first common home, in which we learn to live as ‘All Brothers’, just as one of your children put it, whose parents went to the ‘end of the world’ to seek their future.

## ***A desire in our heart***

We are writing to you as we have a desire in our heart: that what you represent and what you are can be strengthened, that we all learn to feel you are close to us, to feel you are a friend and not someone who is distant or unknown. You need this because people often speak badly of you, and many forget how many important things you do! During COVID, this became visible: only together could we face a pandemic. Unfortunately, we only realise this when we are overwhelmed by necessity, and then we easily forget it! So, when we think we can do it on our own we end up each against the other.

## ***From the onset to today***

We cannot forget how; before you, we had been fighting endless wars whereby millions of people were killed for centuries. All dreams of peace had been shattered on the rocks of wars, the latest world wars, which brought immense destruction and death.



It was out of the tragedy of the Second World War - which reached absolute evil through the Holocaust and the threat to the survival of all mankind due to the atomic bomb - that the seed of the current community of sovereign countries the European Union was born. Some were able to believe that nations were not destined to fight each other, that after so much hatred we could learn to live together. Among those who thought about this project and promoted it, we cannot forget Robert Schuman, a Frenchman, Konrad Adenauer, a German, and Alcide De Gasperi, an Italian: animated by Christian faith, they felt the call to create something that would make war impossible on European soil once again. Their thought was smart, ambitious and courageous. Some steps proved to be difficult, but the strength that comes from unity showed the value of the path taken and the possibility of correcting, adjusting and understanding.

The European Community was built in 1951 on coal and steel, both essential materials for waging war. The purpose of this Community's founders was to prevent any attempt to use these materials against each other again. In fact, those three great men and many others with them longed for more, namely reconciliation between peoples and erasing of hatred and revenge.

The identification of a focus to work together on – though only an economic one at first as testified by the treaties signed in Rome in 1957 - was the beginning: progressively over this path more and more peoples gradually joined the Community up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. And in 1992 a new name was chosen for it: the European Union. Then came the enlargement wave in 2004, including ten new countries of the old Warsaw Pact in one go. Issues needed to be addressed of course. Nevertheless, major developments came about such as the single currency and the removal of barriers to the free movement of people and good between countries, and also the reform to the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009.

### ***Togetherness***

You are a living body, so perhaps the time has come for new institutional reforms in order to allow you to take up today's challenges. You cannot just be a bureaucratic machine - necessary though some structure may be – made of organisations. You have now grown complex. Directives and regulations alone do not enhance cohesion. You need a soul! In recent years, significant steps forward have been taken, such as when you have helped some countries to overcome their economic crises; it is also true that periods of stalemate and difficulties have been endured. These grow when we lose togetherness and the vision of our shared future or when we oppose the concept that our destiny is common and that we need to keep on building a united Europe.

### ***War is back***

That is why sometimes we wonder: Europe, where are you? Where are you heading to? These are also the Pope's questions: "With deep love for Europe, and in the spirit of dialogue that distinguishes this continent, we might ask her: "Where are you sailing, if you are not showing the world paths of peace, creative ways for bringing an end to the war in Ukraine and to the many other conflicts causing so much bloodshed?" Or again, to widen the scope, we might ask: "West, on what course are you sailing?" (*Speech*, Lisbon, 2nd August 2023).



Throughout these years we have changed a lot and find it hard to understand and keep the spirit of the beginnings alive. After such a long period of peace, we thought that a war on European soil would now be impossible. Instead, the last two years show us that what seemed unthinkable is back. We need to take up the project of the founding fathers again and build new peace pacts if we want the war against Ukraine to end. The same is true for the ongoing war in the Middle East, which broke out following the terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October. It continues, alongside a never defeated and now re-emerging sentiment of anti-Semitism. The Italian Constitution states this clearly, too: it is necessary to fight against war and reject it concretely!

If peace is not cared for, there will always be the risk of war. This is what Robert Schuman shared in his Declaration of 9 May 1950, the starting point of the European integration process: “A united Europe was not achieved and we had war”. He was referring to the past, but his words are applicable today, too. Unity must be sought as an always new and urgent task. We should not have to wait for the outbreak of another conflict to understand this.

### ***The international role and the nationalistic temptation***

What role do you play, Europe, in the world? We want you to be able to have an impact and bring forward your willingness for peace, the tools of your diplomacy, your values. Awaken your strength so that your voice can be heard, so that a new equilibrium and international relations can be established. Your internal divisions do not allow you to take on the role that would be expected from your historical and cultural stature. Do you not see the risk that your internal divisions weaken not only your international weight but also your capacity to meet your peoples’ expectations?

So many are those who think they can enjoy the benefits you have undoubtedly brought, as if they could be taken for granted and nothing could jeopardize them. The pandemic or the periodic protests, most recently that of our farmers, unpleasantly shakes us. We become aware that so many acquired advantages could vanish. The sense of necessity, however, is not enough to encourage everyone to overcome divisions. Some would push to believe that we would be better off in isolation, whereas any one of your countries, even a large one, would be fatally reduced to the weakest position. To remain together we need shared motivations, common ideals and values that are appreciated and cultivated. Economic interests are not sufficient as, in the long run, the reasons for togetherness need to be perceived as the only ones that can overcome the tensions and contrasts that economic interests bring with them in their intrinsic confrontation.

Pope Francis said: “At this historical juncture, Europe is crucial, for thanks to its history, it represents the memory of humanity; in this sense, it is called to take up its proper role, which is to unite those far apart, to welcome other peoples and to refuse to consider anyone an eternal enemy. It is vital, then, to recover the European spirit”. (*Speech*, Budapest, 28th April 2023).

Dearest Europe, we would like everyone to feel the pride of belonging to you. Today, anything lying beyond the borders of one's own country seems to be far, sometimes foreign. Yet, both our joint national and the European soul belong to one another. From the onset you have been the Union of free and sovereign countries that gave up part of their sovereignty in favor of a common and stronger one. Therefore, no identity, no freedom, of any person, is lessened;



on the contrary, the safeguard of everyone' autonomy within a structured and loyal relationship with all others is ensured.

### ***European values and Christian faith***

Dearest Europe,

Your ideas and our values define your countenance. The Christian faith has provided a significant contribution to this, too, all the more so since the original project and design of your Union emerged from its Christian sentiment. As Christians, we unceasingly feel a deep responsibility for this and we find in you so much care for the dignity of the human person, which the Gospel of Christ has sown in our hearts and in your culture. Therefore, we suffer when we see that you are afraid of life, that you do not know how to defend it and welcome it from its beginning to its end, and do not always encourage the growth of your population.

"I think of a Europe - says the Pope - that is not hostage to its parts, neither falling prey to self-referential forms of populism nor resorting to a fluid, if not vapid, "supranationalism" that loses sight of the life of its peoples. [...] How much better it would be to build a Europe centred on the human person and on its peoples, with effective policies for natality and the family [...], a Europe whose different nations would form a single family that protects the growth and uniqueness of each of its members". (*Speech*, Budapest, 28th April 2023).

### ***Migrants and related topics and implications***

Dearest Europe,

You cannot just look inwards. You cannot live just to feel good; you need to feel good enough to help the world, to combat injustice, to fight against poverty. For decades you have been the arrival point, the dream of so many migrants coming from different continents and seeking a better life within your borders. Many want to come to you because they are desperately looking for a possibility of a future. And are not many others, already helping you prepare a better one with their work? It is not a matter of welcoming all but of ensuring that no one is losing their life in those 'journeys of hope' and that many find hospitality. The one who welcomes, generates life! Italy is often left alone, as if this were its own problem only or the problem of just a few. This does not mean however that Italy must close itself off. Sooner or later, we will learn that responsibilities, including the ones towards migrants, can only be shared, to face and solve problems that are indeed common problems.

You represent a point of reference for the Mediterranean and African countries, an immense number of peoples and resources in the perspective of a partnership of equals. This is an essential task, because in fact a supranational entity such as the Union cannot exist without mutual international relations that represent and confirm its recognition and role in history, and that promote social and economic progress in the sign of friendship and brotherhood.



## ***Commitments and challenges***

Dearest Europe,

It is time for a new robust relaunch of your path as a Union towards an ever fuller integration, entailing an as fair as possible European taxation system, an assertive foreign policy, a common defense implying your active international responsibility, an enlargement to the countries that are not yet part of your space, a guarantee of a strength that is increasingly proportionate to the unity that you gather and express. The needs for economic and technical innovation (i.e. Artificial Intelligence), of security, of environmental care and custody of the 'common home', of safeguarding welfare and individual and social rights, are just some of the challenges that only together can we face and overcome. Unfortunately, dangers are never out of sight, such as those arising from misinformation, which threatens the orderly unfolding of democratic life and the very possibility of an undistorted memory and history.

Together with democratically adopted institutional reforms, there is a need to grow a common feeling, a shared appreciation of the values that underpin our coexistence in the European Union. What is needed is a new sense of citizenship, a civic sense with a European outlook, the greatness of the peoples of the European continent.

Dearest Europe,

We are deeply persuaded of this: it is above all out of this sense of togetherness between citizens and peoples that you are asking us to build and bind us.

## ***The next elections***

The upcoming elections for the renewal of the European Parliament and the appointment of the European Commission are a propitious and unrepeatably opportunity, to be seized without hesitation. Unfortunately, fears and a sense of insecurity while facing difficulties often prevail. This should be heeded also in order to show that you are the instrument and the place to face and overcome fears and threats.

For all these reasons, we appeal to everyone, candidates and citizens, starting with the 16-year-olds who will be voting for the first time in some countries, to become aware of the importance to ensure this civic gesture is embedded in the participation into the Union's life and development. To refrain from voting is not the same as remaining neutral but it means giving others the power to act without, if not against, our freedom. The responsibility of their actions will need to be shouldered by all. Absenteeism has the effect of increasing mistrust of one another, the loss of the opportunity to make one's own contribution to social life. This would in turn cancel any possibility and capacity to improve togetherness within the European Union.

Our wish for you, dearest European Union, is that this electoral round may indeed become an opportunity for revitalization, a reawakening of enthusiasm for a common path that already contains, in itself and in the vision it projects, a lively sense of hope and of motivated and convinced commitment on the part of your citizens.



### ***A new European humanism***

Let us therefore dream again with Pope Francis: “With mind and heart, with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith, I dream of a new European humanism, one that involves ‘a constant work of humanization’ and calls for ‘memory, courage, [and] a sound and humane utopian vision’”. (*Speech*, Vatican, 6th May 2016).