REFLECTION PAPER

The European Union's role in a changing world: From founding vision to global mission

Table of contents

This Reflection Paper was drafted by the COMECE Commission on EU External Relations as a contribution to the ongoing discourse on the global role of the European Union. It particularly focuses on selected policy areas of defence, security & peace, EU enlargement, international partnerships, trade and sustainable human development, as well as on respective elements of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. Its aim is to offer European decision-makers some reflections for orientation and recommendations for concrete action.

Executive summary

In a context of growing geopolitical tensions and weakening multilateralism, the EU's global role is increasingly being challenged. Its vocation as a project of peace, rooted in the values of human dignity, solidarity and justice, calls for a renewal of the founding fathers' vision with 'creative fidelity' to its political, cultural and spiritual roots. As attention shifts towards defence and competitiveness, the EU must not lose sight of its moral and legal commitment to peace and sustainable human development, nor of its historic responsibility to grow as a community and to expand its promise of stability and shared prosperity. This Reflection Paper proposes a value-based, people-centred and coherent approach across EU external action, also in view of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

Key recommendations for action:

Defence, Security & Peace

- ⇒ Ensure that defence spending remains proportionate to the actual needs and is guided by the objective of human security and peace, not by commercial interests; communicate security and defence policies with clarity that peace—not rearmament or defence-industrial competitiveness —is the overarching goal.
- ⇒ Initiate work on an overarching 'European Peace Strategy' as an update of the EU Global Strategy and a complement to the EU Strategic Compass, to consolidate the concept of 'peace' and to operationalise an integral approach to human security and peace; foster the 'Triple Nexus' (Humanitarian-Development-Peace) and further strengthen links between external and internal security policies, including in the areas of organised crime and extremism.
- ⇒ Reinforce EU and international legal and ethical safeguards on the research into as well as the production and use of automated and other modern defence technologies, including through the elaboration of pertinent EU Guidelines; improve EU arms export controls and promote universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty; promote multilateral engagement on disarmament, including updating the 2003 EU's Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).
- ⇒ Contribute to a new global architecture of peace and a strengthening of the rules-based multilateral system, with a reformed, more participatory and effective UN at its core.

EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

- ⇒ Support candidate countries with reform incentives and adequate funding,

granting them a gradual access to the EU Single Market, EU programmes, agencies and committees, while ensuring that the accession process remains fair and merit-based.

⇒ Strengthen citizen and civil society engagement, including with faith-based organisations (FBOs), during pre-accession to foster social cohesion and orient public opinion towards recognising the benefits of EU enlargement, in both candidate countries and EU Member States.

⇒ Continue with internal EU reforms to maintain functionality in a larger and more diverse Union; explore effective ways of governance, while respecting the principles of subsidiarity, power-sharing and political equality; any adjustments to budgetary frameworks and policies must take into account their impact on people in both current and future Member States.

⇒ Promote tailored engagement with neighbouring countries based on their political, economic and cultural realities; further develop the European Political Community; deepen EU-UK cooperation, particularly in areas of education, people-to-people contacts, security and peacebuilding.

International Partnerships, Trade and Sustainable Human Development

⇒ Promote a 'relational' strategic autonomy: reduce harmful external dependencies, but deepen alliances with like-minded partners to promote peace, sustainable human development and climate action; seek new partnerships that do not merely balance, but combine self-interest with values in a coherent way; empower economically weaker countries, while preventing exploitative practices, ensure local ownership and promote meaningful participation in joint decision-making processes and in their implementation.

⇒ Ensure that trade and external economic activities promote human dignity, fair working conditions and environmental protection, especially through enforceable human rights clauses in trade agreements and responsible business conduct; maintain the integrity of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD).

⇒ In the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, avoid merging key external instruments to preserve their specific mandates; uphold the 0.7% GNI target for development aid and avoid diverting ODA to 'non-developmental' purposes; maintain a strong engagement with fragile, conflict-affected and low-income countries.

⇒ Advocate for the restructuring of unjust and unsustainable debts without harmful conditionalities, and promote long-term reforms towards a fair, inclusive and sustainable global financial system.

⇒ Promote a more systematic engagement with grassroots actors, including FBOs, to enable EU assistance to directly reach local communities in situations of vulnerability or in emergency settings; through an enhanced access to respective EU funding instruments and assistance programmes, support the non-profit efforts of local actors, including FBOs, in areas such as education, healthcare, the provision of basic social services and peacebuilding.

1. The changing global environment

The European Union finds itself navigating an **increasingly hostile, uncertain and transactional global environment**. Violent conflicts, including Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and the spiral of violence in the Middle East, have shaken the foundations of the European and global security architecture. The international legal framework is under growing pressure, with humanitarian law blatantly violated and the rules-based order increasingly contested by authoritarian regimes and disruptive forces.

The world is becoming more fractured than it has been at any point since the end of the Cold War, as a new multipolar structure takes shape; whether and how it will be capable of replacing the deteriorating existing order remains to be seen. Emerging powers and coalitions are asserting growing influence and **seeking to undermine or reshape the current international system**. Meanwhile, some of the very actors that forged the post-World War II order, built on commitments to democracy and the rule of law, to open trade, and to institutionalised multilateralism, are stepping back, adapting, or even rejecting its core tenets. In this respect, **the transatlantic partnership** has recently **experienced a particular strain**, as certain policies of the current US administration have introduced a degree of unpredictability and disruption, challenging long-established formats of political, security and economic cooperation.

The **erosion of trust** in international cooperation reflects a broader crisis of multilateralism, as **nationalist and isolationist tendencies** gain attraction and confidence in international and supranational institutions wanes. This shift manifests itself in growing calls for intergovernmentalism and an emphasis on national sovereignty, at the expense of a collaborative approach rooted in shared responsibility and solidarity. Yet, an effective tackling of numerous challenges, from climate change and global health crises to organised crime, requires collective efforts, as they extend beyond the borders and capabilities of any single country.

At the same time, however, we can observe certain tendencies at the European level that seek to redefine fundamental aspects of human identity and social life, often in contradiction with national norms, values and socio-cultural traditions. These developments risk disregarding the integral anthropology that underpins human dignity and authentic human development. When pursued **without due regard for the principle of subsidiarity**, such tendencies may **erode trust in European institutions** and **foment anti-European sentiments**.

As **truth, facts and science** are increasingly **challenged** through disinformation campaigns and the manipulation of narratives, **democratic principles are weakened**, and democratic processes are undermined, both from within and outside. Populist forces are rising in Europe and across the world, often promoting a 'nationalism of exclusion' that retreats into narrow, self-serving interests, foments **polarisation** and may even lead to violent extremism.

While the interconnectedness of our globalised world has fostered prosperity and created manifold opportunities for cooperation, it is now also being exploited as a vulnerability by some hostile actors. Strategic rivalries increasingly manifest

themselves in the **'weaponisation of everything'**, from energy and migration to technology and critical infrastructure, turning interdependence into a tool of coercion.

Moreover, **extreme poverty, hunger and growing socio-economic inequalities –** often exacerbated by violent conflicts - continue to pose a threat to **human dignity** of many, especially in the 'Global South', while **progressing environmental degradation** further amplifies these challenges. These factors do not only undermine sustainable human development, but also often serve as root causes of instability.

2. What does the EU stand for in today's world? – Renewing the founding vision with 'creative fidelity'

Seventy five years ago, **Robert Schuman** proclaimed his landmark Declaration. As we reflect on the role of the European Union in this rapidly changing global environment, it is not only important to recall its founding vision, but also to **reinvigorate its spirit** and re-commit to its implementation. At its heart, the **European Union** was **conceived as a *community*** towards the goal of **lasting peace in Europe**, following the devastation of two world wars.

The architects of this vision sought to **replace conflict with cooperation and reconciliation**, grounded in **'de-facto solidarity'** and shared economic prosperity. They drew deeply on **values rooted in the Christian heritage of Europe**, for which the recognition of the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, solidarity, justice and the pursuit of the common good were fundamental. These values became the moral foundation upon which the future of modern Europe was built.

The European Union is therefore more than just a geographical area, and it cannot be reduced merely to its economic dimension. The EU is above all **a community of people and nations** committed to a **shared system of principles, values and norms**. As Pope Benedict XVI. emphasised, *"an authentic European 'common home' cannot be built without considering the identity of the people of this Continent of ours. It is a question of a **historical, cultural, and moral identity** before being a geographic, economic, or political one; an identity comprised of a set of universal values that Christianity helped forge, thus giving Christianity not only a historical but a foundational role vis-à-vis Europe. These values, which make up the soul of the Continent, must remain in the Europe of the third millennium as a 'ferment' of civilization. If these values were to disappear, how could the 'old' Continent continue to function as a 'leaven' for the entire world?"*

In today's rapidly changing global environment, the **EU's founding principles and values**, as outlined in Art 2 TEU, must therefore continue serving as a **compass for political orientation**. They do not only provide a sense of predictability and stability, but they are also an **intrinsic part of the EU's identity**.

Yet, the European Union faces a crossroads, where the very ideals of peace, solidarity, social justice and cooperation appear increasingly under threat, both within Europe and in its external relations. In a global environment shaped by geopolitical rivalry, accelerating technological change and the strategic ambitions of rising powers, **the EU is confronted with significant challenges to maintain its credibility and global presence, while coherently upholding the commitment to its founding vision**.

What went wrong?

Despite its unique potential to be a global normative power, the EU has been struggling to assert itself as a relevant actor on the international stage. Several factors may have contributed to this development. An underlying cause may have been a **weak shared European strategic culture** and a lost sense of belonging to the same 'community of destiny' united in diversity. Without a strategy how to develop the EU further politically and a unified vision of EU's role in the world, its Member States have often tended to **prioritise national interests** rather **than** acting as a cohesive geopolitical force in pursuit of the **common good** and rooted in **shared values** that had inspired its very foundation. Internal divisions among Member States as well as competing particular interests or the striving for short-term economic and political gains have frequently hampered unity and delayed decisive political action at the European level, making it harder for the Union to respond consistently and effectively to ever growing external challenges. The **lack of internal cohesion**, often resulting in **policy incoherencies**, has considerably weakened the EU's credibility and influence on the world stage.

Moreover, the **EU's rather reactive posture and limited capacity for more anticipatory action** have reduced its ability to effectively address the multiple crises of the present and to shape global developments more proactively. Its diplomatic weight has consequently declined and its role in conflict prevention, mediation and transformation has increasingly diminished, also in regions where it once used to play a stabilising role.

A growing **dependence on external actors** in key strategic sectors, such as energy, digital technologies or defence, has undermined the EU's resilience and its capacity for autonomous initiatives. The EU has also lagged behind in areas of innovation, productivity and industrial capacity in comparison to other global actors, as recently evidenced by the Draghi Report.

European decision-makers are today called to withstand the pressures of regressing into isolationism or into the pursuit of narrow visions. Instead, they are expected to find ways to regain the EU's internal and external credibility. For this it is necessary to **rediscover and reclaim with '*creative fidelity*'** (cf. Saint Pope John Paul II) **those fundamental virtues and principles** that had inspired the very foundation of the European Union, so that, while remaining faithful to its roots, it can continue offering adequate policy responses to the challenges of our times. Schuman's vision of **turning instruments of war**—such as coal and steel—**into instruments of peace** may serve as inspiration also today. This could be applied creatively to strategic goods (such as energy or digital infrastructure) that have the potential to fuel wars or exacerbate tensions, but which could instead be transformed into tools for cooperation, stability and peace.

For the EU's founding fathers the pursuit of '**creative efforts of peace'** was paramount, but so was also the idea that Europe's destiny was intertwined not just with itself but also with the wider world. Saint Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this by stating that "*Saying 'Europe' must be equivalent to saying **openness***", while late Pope Francis used to refer to the EU as '*a promise of peace*' and '*a source of development*' for herself and for the whole world, "*if it rediscovers itself as a community*".

3. The European Union as 'a promise of peace' and 'a source of development' for herself and for the world

The EU's initial response to the shifts in the geopolitical landscape and in the global economy has up to now primarily focused on strengthening the defence capabilities of its Member States and on enhancing its global competitiveness. Both areas have been declared key EU strategic priorities. The first concrete actions have already been announced and launched with the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030 and the EU Competitiveness Compass. At the same time, with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the engagement of various global actors in EU's neighbourhood, the Union and its Member States seem to have rediscovered the strategic value of EU enlargement, paving the way for candidate countries to progress on the path towards a future EU membership, which has been delayed for some time.

A) The EU as a peace project in times of war

Echoing the first words of Pope Leo XIV. following his recent election, as Christians we believe in the ultimate peace that comes from God, the peace of the risen Christ: a **peace** that is "*unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering*". As the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms, earthly peace shall be "*the image and the fruit of the peace of Christ*" (cf. Catechism, 2305).

As Pope Leo XIV. emphasised, peace is **both a gift and a task**, which engages and challenges each of us, and which we are all called to build in this world – a peace that allows respect for and development of human life. For Pope Leo XIV., the building of **authentic peace requires** the promotion of **justice** and the commitment to **truth**. In this respect, the Pope has also called for '*a **disarmed and disarming communication***' that "*allows to act in a manner consistent with our **human dignity***".

The Catholic Church has consistently denounced the 'savagery of war' and urged governments to do everything possible to avoid violence and bloodshed. At the same time, however, the Church has recognised that "*as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the **right of lawful self-defence**, once all peace efforts have failed*" (Catechism, 2308). This right is however to be exercised with **utmost caution**, under **very strict conditions** (cf. Catechism, 2309), as it is easy to "*fall into an overly broad interpretation of this potential right*" (Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, 258). In this respect, Pope Francis noted in his last Urbi et Orbi Message that "*the requirement that every people provide for its own defence must not turn into a race to rearmament*".

Almost ten years ago, in the context of the elaboration of the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, the Bishops of COMECE outlined their vision for 'an authentic European peace policy' that would be based on three pillars: *Pre-emptive* peacebuilding, promoting peace through *Justice*, and defending peace through *Force*.

Propelled by geopolitical developments, the necessity to defend peace through the means of force has recently gained a particular relevance also at the European level. Increased risk of a potential military attack on the territory of an EU Member State and shifting US attention towards other regions of the world, are prompting the **EU and its Member States** to become **more responsible for their own defence** and **better**

equipped for autonomous action in case of need. Moreover, adequate support remains essential for **Ukraine** as it continues to defend its territorial integrity, sovereignty and freedom. In this context, the EU has announced plans to leverage over €800 billion in additional and more efficient European defence spending over the next four years, including through national fiscal flexibility and a new €150 billion loan instrument (SAFE) for joint procurement of defence capabilities. Also, a Preparedness Union Strategy has been designed to support EU Member States and their citizens to better respond to emerging risks and threats.

In their Statement adopted during the 2025 Spring Plenary Assembly, the Bishops of COMECE recognised "*the need for a strong European Union capable of protecting, in these uncertain times, not only its citizens but also values championed in Europe and indeed across the world. We nevertheless believe that the EU's original vocation is to be a project of peace. Any necessary, proportionate and adequate investments towards European defence must therefore not come at the expense of efforts aimed at promoting human dignity, justice, integral human development and the care of Creation. Effective control mechanisms and a steadfast commitment to diplomacy are essential for preventing a dangerous arms race that would not serve the cause of peace, but only commercial interests.*"

Building upon the orientations offered by the Bishops of COMECE, we would like to particularly refer to four possible risks that the current re-armament dynamic in Europe and globally may imply, and propose some actions to contain them:

i. Not losing sight of the strategic objective of peace

Even, and particularly, in times of war, it is important not to fall into 'a logic of war', but to **act in 'a logic of peace'**. The EU's vocation to promote peace is not only a **moral responsibility** grounded in its roots and values, but also a **legal commtiment** arising from the Treaties (cf. Art 3.1 TEU: "*The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples*", and Art 21.2 (c) TEU: "*preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders*").

The strengthening of European **defence** should therefore not be regarded as a goal in itself, but rather as **one of the means to protect human dignity and human lives in pursuit of peace**. Thus, the increased investments in defence should not be presented as a main case for the advancement of corporate interests or as a major driver of Europe's competitiveness, since such an approach risks putting defence not **at the service of the public goal** – and common interest - **of peace**, but rather of other, particular interests. This consideration should also be taken into account by the EU decision-makers in their **public communication** on respective policies in the area of security and defence.

For **NATO** Member States, the alliance should remain the **cornerstone of collective defence**, though especially its **European pillar** may require further enhancement. Nevertheless, the shifting strategic focus of the United States of America may compel the EU and its Member States to **reinforce their own defence capacities**, possibly also in **cooperation with other like-minded partners.**

The building of a **'Defence Union'** will, however, not be possible without the fostering of a true **'Political Union'**, with a **shared strategic culture** and a **genuine political will to cooperate** among EU Member States. At the same time, it is important that in accordance with the Treaties, the Common Security and Defence Policy continues respecting the specific character of the security and defence policies of all Member States.

In view of promoting **inter-operability** across the Union, a ***necessary***, ***proportionate*** **and** ***adequate*** **investment** in the means of European defence may consequently include a joint development or procurement of capabilities in ***sufficient*** **quantity and quality** in **all strategic domains** (land, air, sea, exo-atmospheric space as well as cyberspace and the hybrid domain), while respecting **strict legal and ethical common standards**.

Even if a cetain degree of deterrence may have become necessary in the current geopolitcal context as a means of defence, it is worth recalling the words of late Pope Francis who repeatedly stated that we cannot ensure a lasting peace merely through "*a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust*". It is not only a duty in terms of international law but also an ethical imperative to **avoid the use of force** in confict situations **whenever possible**. Therefore, an increased policy attention should rather be given to means of 'pre-emptive peacebuilding', promoting non-violent actions that **foster trust** and, if enacted at an early stage, may prevent the emergence of situations, in which the only alternative is the recourse to force. As highlighted in a recent Report of the European Parliament on the Role of Preventive Diplomacy, the global funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding being at a 15-year record low, the European Union should **enhance its preventive diplomacy toolbox** by reinforcing its early warning systems, by paying greater attention to the local and cultural contexts as well as by strengthening its partnerships with other international and regional partners and organisations in this regard.

ii. Reinforcing control mechanisms and ethical standards

The lethal and destructive potential of weapons bears the risk of abusing this power – be it by state or corporate actors. Arms should therefore never be treated like any other goods traded on international or domestic markets. Increased investment in industrial defence production must go hand in hand with **pertinent control mechanisms** to ensure coherence with the objective of peace as well as compliance with the principles of *necessity*, *sufficiency*, *adequacy* and *proportionality*. The European Parliament should have a particular role to play in this oversight. Moreover, we urge that the announced Omnibus simplification proposal for defence may not lower the pertinent safeguards and standards ensuring policy coherence and preventing the risk of excessive re-armament with negative consequences for human rights or the maintenance of stability and peace.

Special caution is called for the research into as well as the development and deployment of **automated military technologies**, such as uncrewed armed systems or technologies using artificial intelligence, which must follow a strict legal and ethical assessment on the basis of a clearly defined anthropological and ethical reference framework. In this regard, we therefore reiterate our plea for the elaboration of EU Guidelines on defence-related research as well as technology development and

deployment to ensure that the defence equipment financed by the European Union is put at the service of human security and peace.

In addition, with increased arms production, more effective, coherent and accountable regulatory frameworks for arms exports are needed at the European level. Following the recent Council review of the EU framework for **arms export control**, we plead for its due implementation by the Member States in order to pursue a responsible and transparent trade in arms, prevent diversion of arms to unintended use by criminals or other unauthorised users, and to build convergence of national arms export policies of Member States. We equally encourage the EU and its Member States to promote the universalisation and effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

In order not to reinforce an armament dynamic in Europe and globally, a stronger defence cooperation among Member States should go hand in hand with **intensified multilateral engagement for disarmament and for non-proliferation** of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. As the current volatile geopolitical situation demonstrates, the continued possession of nuclear weapons poses an existential threat to humanity and is not consistent with international legal obligations to promote peace and sustainable development. We therefore call on the European Union and its Member States to update its Strategy against proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction of 2003 in order to reflect the recent legal (incl. the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – TPNW), geopolitical and technological developments, and step up its international engagement towards a world free from nuclear weapons.

iii. Preventing the risk of financial instability

The proposals contained in the Rearm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030 for increased defence investment are mostly based on assuming new debts at the national and European levels. They foresee a relaxation of EU fiscal rules by allowing Member States to increase their defence spending by up to 1.5% of GDP over four years, potentially mobilising up to €650 bn. They also establish a new financial instrument that channels EU loans to interested countries, worth €150 bn. This approach, especially the relaxation of EU fiscal rules, entails **risks related to varying national fiscal capacities**, since several low-debt countries may decide not to activate the 'national escape clause', whereas others that are already fiscally weak, may become even more indebted if they make use of it, thus potentially triggering a fiscal crisis, which could put at risk the financial stability of the whole European project.

While establishing pertinent benchmarks and safeguard mechanisms to prevent this from happening, the EU should increasingly look into **generating new own resources**. Moreover, a genuine 'Savings and Investments Union' as recently proposed by the European Council, building upon a successful completion of the Capital Markets Union and the Banking Union, may have the potential to channel significant financial resources to the European economy.

iv. Promoting an integral approach to human security and peace

Security is essential for peace if it aims at protecting human dignity. **Peace** is, however, **more than the absence of war and violence**. It above all requires the

establishment of an order which is based on justice, on integral human development, on respect for human rights and on the care of Creation.

Amid violent conflicts, especially those visibly present in the media, we tend to forget that threats to human life and to the security of people are not only posed by open military confrontations, but by **'less visible' factors**: hunger, extreme poverty, lacking access to basic necessities and by environmental degradation. Millions of people have become victims of such 'invisible' conflicts due to restricted access to the fulfilment of basic needs such as clean water, adequate nutrition, electricity or medicines, not to speak of the victims of natural disasters or of economic conflicts or forced migration. The number of people who have been forced to flee their homes has doubled in the past decade, while the number of people needing emergency aid has doubled since 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that **public health** is deeply intertwined with peace and security, as the global crisis exacerbated social inequalities, strained governance and fueled instability. **Preventing future pandemics** must therefore be considered an essential component of the broader human security and peacebuilding agenda.

Therefore, genuine and effective peacebuilding requires **an integral and comprehensive approach** that makes full use of a toolbox of different policy areas, including trade, development, climate, energy, social policy, human rights, migration and others, to promote just and peaceful conditions, allowing the recourse to force only as a last resort, once all non-violent means to achieve peace have failed. The **Team Europe Approach** bringing together EU institutions, Member States and other actors who join resources and expertise in a coordinated manner is a step in the right direction. It could be **further strengthened**, extended also to other policy areas and involve additional stakeholders, including civil society and grassroots actors.

Increased investment in hard security and defence must not shift policy attention and resources away from addressing the political, economic, environmental, social and cultural causes of violent conflicts. It is not sufficient to invest significant amounts of resources into fighting the symptoms of insecurity, while failing to effectively address the underlying factors of instability. We make this plea all the more, as the European Commission is about to publish its proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the European institutions will soon start their negotiations on this matter. They should make sure that the increased investments in defence do not go at the expense of efforts in other areas that are crucial for promoting peace.

In view of harmonising the different understandings of the concept of *peace* across the Union, and to ensure that it is not reduced to its *security* dimension only, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy may initiate work on **a 'European Peace Strategy'** (or a 'European Consensus on Peace'), as an update of the EU Global Strategy (2016) and as a complement to the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (2022). Such a strategic framework document may also complete the elements provided by the European Consensus on Development and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid as part of the so-called 'Triple Nexus' (Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus). Amid a number of partial strategic frameworks, an overarching European Peace Strategy could provide the EU with the necessary strategic guidance for a more effective conflict prevention and promotion of human security and peace in a truly integral and coherent way. It may also help to

reinforce EU's civilian peacebuilding policies, as well as strengthen its capacities in areas of preventive diplomacy, mediation, conflict transformation, post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, while contributing to a better tackling of the 'invisible' conflicts and their humanitarian impact.

In an increasingly interconnected and complex global environment, the European Union must continue to **strengthen the links between its external and internal security** policies. One critical area requiring deeper coordination is **the fight against organised crime**, which not only erodes the rule of law but also fuels corruption and conflict in vulnerable regions. The EU should make more strategic use of instruments such as countering tax evasion, dismantling tax havens, addressing the role and responsibilities of financial intermediaries and combatting money laundering networks, which are often exploited to finance criminal and destabilising activities (cf. Justitia et Pax Germany, 'Organised crime as a challenge for society and the Church).

Equally pressing is the need to **address societal polarisation and the rise of extremism**, which are frequently amplified by disinformation and foreign interference. This challenge calls for a **whole-of-society response**, based on a **multilayered and multistakeholder approach**. Education, digital and media literacy, responsible use of technology, regulation, diplomatic engagement and community-based initiatives must be combined to foster social cohesion and democratic resilience. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for the EU to act as a credible and effective promoter of peace and security also on the global stage.

Moreover, a **long-term historical perspective** is essential, encompassing both the pre-war and post-war periods. Past injustices have frequently contributed to the emergence of further conflicts. In many instances across Europe, there has been insufficient engagement with the **legacies of conflicts** associated with authoritarian regimes, both within and beyond national borders. The resurgence of 'new nationalisms' and expansionist ambitions advocated by certain political forces pose a potential challenge to European unity and peace. For such groups, unresolved grievances from past conflicts often drive desires for retribution and deepen divisions between communities. It would be timely to also develop strategies addressing these intangible factors that endanger peace in Europe, placing greater emphasis on a shared history that integrates rather than divides (cf. Saint Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 27).

v. Contributing to a new global architecture of peace

Since building lasting peace requires both 'an *art* and an *architecture* of peace' (Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, 228 ff), together with other regional and international organisations and actors, the EU should strive for **re-building an architecture of peace in Europe and globally**, one that is based on mutual trust, solidarity and inclusive multilateral cooperation, and that effectively prevents violent conflicts from arising. Besides further strengthening the **complementarity between the EU and NATO**, this may also include renewing the partnership with the **OSCE** and promoting a **reinvigoration of multilateralism**. A **reform of the United Nations** should make sure that its structures and procedures allow all countries to genuinely and equitably contribute to decision-making processes, so that it becomes more effective in addressing the challenges to human security and peace.

B) The process of 'completing' the European Union

As Saint Pope John Paul II envisioned back in 2003 with regard to EU enlargement, *"all peoples who share its same fundamental heritage have a vocation to take part in it, on a short-term or a long-term basis"*. In his vision, this process should "*come about in a way that respects all people, valuing their historical and cultural distinctions, their national identities and the great contributions which can come from new members. It should also take place in a way that puts into practice in an ever more fully developed manner the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity*". Moreover, the EU integration process should not reduce the Union merely to its geographic and economic dimensions, but "*it must consist above all in an agreement about the values which must find expression in its law and in its life*".

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the geopolitical developments in EU's neighbourhood have generated **a new momentum for future accessions to the Union**, especially with regard to the six countries in the Western Balkans and three in the East of Europe. In times of a global 'disorder', a more united Europe can be a factor of stability and pacification. Enlarging the Union may not only be regarded as a geopolitical necessity, but also as an economic opportunity for more decent work and sustainable growth, but above all as **a strong message of hope for the citizens** of the candidate countries and as an answer to their desire for living in justice and peace after a long period of violent conflicts and hardships. Also for the citizens of the current EU Member States the enlargement of the Union may be seen as a **source of enrichment** from the cultural, as well as religious and spiritual point of view. The future expansion of the EU thus becomes an opportunity to rediscover and 'update' the idea of a united Europe.

Building upon the vision outlined by the COMECE Bishops on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the historic EU enlargement in 2024, we would like to offer recommendations on some specific aspects of the EU accession process as well as on EU's own internal reforms that may be necessary in view of future enlargements.

i. Learning from previous EU enlargements

Even though a solid degree of political and economic integration has been achieved across the Union, one of the lessons learnt from previous EU enlargements is that the same cannot be said with respect to having developed **a true European spirit**; a sense of belonging to the same 'community of destiny' truly *united in diversity*, as once envisioned by Robert Schuman. In this regard, a dialogue of national realities, cultures, historical experiences and identities has not sufficiently taken place across European societies. As long as such a true European spirit has not been developed, the forging of unity and trust within the Union may be faced with challenges of putting particular interests above the European common good.

As the future European Union will not only be larger but also more diverse, a particular attention needs to be devoted to the **fostering of a shared value basis** and the special bonds that will continue to unite us as a European family of nations and peoples. This will require **enhanced involvement of citizens** in the further construction of our common European project already during the pre-accession phase, by creating spaces for strengthening personal and community relations across the borders of current and future EU Member States. Organisations of civil society as well

as Churches and religious communities present in all the candidate countries, can play a fundamental role in this regard, including through possibilities offered by Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Participatory and inclusive dialogue across borders of current and future EU countries is also important in view of inclining public opinion in our societies towards a more positive stance on EU enlargement.

Moreover, in order to bring concrete benefits to citizens of the candidate countries already during the pre-accession phase, **a gradual integration and closer cooperation** between current and future EU Member States may be pursued with regard to the participation in the EU Single Market, as well as in the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Health Union and in the opportunities for students and professionals under various EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. In this regard, a further opening of EU agencies and committees to the candidate countries may be further encouraged. At the same time, however, the EU enlargement process should **not be instrumentalised to impose** on the candidate countries the conditions to accept **certain concepts** in their legislation that are in contradiction with their ethos, beliefs and socio-cultural traditions. On the contrary, the EU accession process should **respect and promote their historical, cultural and spiritual distinctions** as a source of mutual enrichment.

ii. Promoting a citizen-centred, credible and fair EU enlargement process

Accession to the EU is **a two-way process**. The countries aspiring to a future EU membership must continue pursuing the necessary but sometimes difficult socio-economic and political processes and structural **reforms** in crucial areas, such as the rule of law, strengthening of democratic institutions, fundamental rights, including religious freedom and freedom of the media, as well as fight against corruption, and tackling organised crime. At the same time, the EU should continue effectively supporting the candidate countries in their reform efforts and adequately respond to them, including through financial incentives. A **citizen-centred, credible and fair EU enlargement process** should, moreover, avoid any double-standards in the treatment of the candidate countries, since this may, in turn, lead to frustrations and anti-European sentiments in the population.

iii. Pursuing EU internal reforms in view of future enlargements

The credibility of the EU accession process also implies concrete steps on the side of the European Union to become ready to welcome new members. A larger and more diverse EU will have to **rethink political, institutional, administrative and budgetary questions**. This will also require exploring new ways of **governance** that will enable the EU institutions to function effectively, while **respecting the principles of subsidiarity, power-sharing and of political equality**. Any adjustments to budgetary frameworks, to policies and to areas of cooperation should take into consideration their **impact on people**, especially the most vulnerable members of the societies of current and future Member States. When balancing budgetary adjustments against the benefits of an enlarged Union, it may be helpful to recall that the European Commission has recently estimated the economic benefits of the EU Single Market to amount to about 8.5% of the Union's GDP.

iv. Engaging with the broader neighbourhood

In light of the evolving dynamics between the EU's Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies, particularly within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, there is a **need for a more differentiated approach** in EU's relations with the respective countries and regions. This approach should reflect the diverse political realities, ambitions and governance contexts of concerned countries, enabling **tailored engagement** that ranges from supporting reform and integration processes to fostering dialogue and economic, academic and civil society cooperation where political alignment may be more limited (cf. Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University, Recommendations on a Reform of the European Eastern Policy).

At the same time, initiatives like the **European Political Community** should be further developed as a platform for inclusive dialogue and strategic coordination across the wider European space. This broader engagement is essential to building trust, preventing conflict and strengthening the continent's resilience. Furthermore, the recent positive re-set in **EU-UK** relations offers a valuable opportunity to further deepen cooperation. It should be actively pursued to bring the EU and the UK closer together in promoting common values and addressing shared challenges, including in the area of education, people-to-people contacts, security and peacebuilding.

C) The EU as a responsible and value-based global actor for sustainable human development

The Catholic Church has favoured the concept of a ***social market economy***, regarding markets not only as an exchange of goods and services, but foremost as relations between people. Since trade should primarily benefit people, and not just markets and economies, each economic activity should aim at promoting ***integral human development*** - the development of all persons and of the whole person.

Economic models that **privilege** profit maximisation at all costs over **people and their natural environment**, cannot be considered ethical. As Pope Francis emphasised in his encyclical Laudato Si' (No. 195), "*the principle of the maximisation of profits, frequently isolated from other considerations, reflects a misunderstanding of the very concept of the economy. […] Yet only when the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognised with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations, can those actions be considered ethical*".

In order to boost Europe's competitiveness, the European Commission has recently proposed measures to enhance the EU's **capacity for production and innovation**, to pursue a competitiveness-driven approach to **decarbonisation** and to **reduce excessive dependencies**. Simplification has been presented as one of the key enablers for competitiveness by reducing the regulatory and administrative burden for European companies.

At their 2025 Spring Plenary Assembly, the Bishops of COMECE stated: "*In response to current shifts in the global economy and in the geopolitical landscape, we acknowledge the EU's efforts to enhance its competitiveness and its capacity for autonomous action. Nevertheless, we urge that these efforts do not undermine the EU's historical commitment to solidarity, especially with the most vulnerable regions of the world as well as with those suffering from poverty or those seeking refuge. Nor should such initiatives compromise the*

EU's credibility as a global leader in promoting human rights, social justice and environmental sustainability. Amid growing international polarisation, we emphasise the importance of preserving longstanding partnerships and alliances, while seeking to open up new processes of dialogue and cooperation."

Building upon the orientation offered by the COMECE Bishops, we would like to focus on some selected aspects of the EU's competitiveness agenda and its implications for the areas of trade, sustainable human development and corporate social responsibility.

i. Pursuing a 'relational' strategic autonomy

In the context of the threats of trade and tariff wars, particularly coming from the current US administration, the **preferred way** for the EU should be that of **dialogue and settlement** coherent with its values, before potentially resorting to retaliatory and anti-coercion measures. An escalating trade and tariff conflict would not benefit neither side, with harmful effects for the economy and welfare of all, hitting workers as well as consumers. The initial tariff policy steps of the current US administration have already triggered considerable turmoil on international stock markets, raising fears of inflation and recession. In order for the economy to strive, **a stable and predictable political and social environment** is necessary. Despite the existing challenges, it is our hope that, as EU and US Bishops jointly declared four years ago, the European Union and the United States of America will take forward "*their shared commitment to the promotion of global peace, justice, and human development*", since their long-standing partnership has been based on "*shared values and principles of freedom, democracy, rights of nations, the rule of law, justice, and respect for human life*". In this perspective it is to be hoped that an **intensified dialogue between EU and US Bishops** will also **contribute to enhancing** the **political and economic relations** between the two regions.

Even if today's world is marked by increasing isolationist and protectionist tendencies, the EU should not "close in on itself. It cannot and must not lose interest in the rest of the world. On the contrary, it must remain fully aware of the fact that other countries, other continents, await its bold initiatives […] to build a more just and fraternal world" (Saint Pope John Paul II). As the geopolitical landscape remains fraught with instability, uncertainty and unpredictability, the **EU must continue acting as a credible, united, trust-building, stabilising and integrating force**. It should pursue **a 'relational' strategic autonomy:** While decreasing harmful dependencies on authoritarian and hostile regimes and reducing its external vulnerabilities, the EU should **remain open to deepening people-centred and fair alliances** with like-minded partners in its neighbourhood and globally, including the United Kingdom, Canada, India, the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

In order to overcome divisions and distrust within the international community, the EU also needs to reflect on creative ways of **constructive, coherent and value-based engagement** with other global actors to address the manifold challenges of today, from promoting international peace and security to fostering sustainable human development and addressing climate change. It is in the EU's DNA, with its broad range of policy areas and instruments – from diplomacy, trade, development

cooperation to its human rights and climate policies - to use them for the **opening up of new channels of dialogue and cooperation**, while remaining faithful to its founding values and principles.

ii. Promoting free and fair trade

Besides leading international efforts towards a strengthened multilateral trading system based on equitable rules, the EU should also continue negotiating and concluding **free and fair trade agreements** with other countries and regions, in the understanding that trade can be a positive-sum game, with genuine mutual benefit, even in cases of an initial asymmetry between trade partners. The stronger party should not exploit the weaknesses of the other, but on the contrary, it should strive to empower its partner to reduce imbalances. As a tool to decrease global inequalities and foster inclusive and sustainable human development, trade agreements concluded by the EU should therefore not merely balance but **combine self-interest with values and principles** in a coherent way. They should aim at promoting dignified working conditions, enhancing social protection, offering economic opportunities for local small-scale entrepreneurs, and at respecting human rights and environmental standards. An important instrument in this regard are **binding human rights clauses** in trade agreements, which must also be enforceable.

Another crucial element are **effective mechanisms of corporate social responsibility.** Without putting in place such safeguards for upholding the ethicality and equity of trade relations, the EU runs the **risk of perpetuating historical injustices** and imbalances by replicating certain extractive patterns of the past: privileging European corporate and strategic interests over the needs and aspirations of the partner countries, especially those in the "Global South". Moreover, the lack of **effective local ownership** and of **inclusive participation** in decision-making processes may further reinforce this perception that is often felt in the societies of EU's partner countries.

An issue of particular concern to our partners in Africa and Latin America is the **extraction of raw materials**. Propelled by targets of digital and green transitions, the EU has recently declared its ambition to foster its access to a secure and diversified supply of critical raw materials, which is likely to lead to an increase of mining in resource-rich countries, many of them located in Africa and Latin America. These regions are also witnessing growing involvement from other global actors, whose pursuit of critical minerals often prioritises economic and geopolitical gain over the well-being of local populations. In this context, it is crucial that the EU distinguishes itself by avoiding an approach driven solely by economic or geostrategic self-interest. Instead, it must act in coherence with its founding values, ensuring **enforceable high human rights, social, and environmental standards**, including the respect for the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent. At the same time, the EU should also promote **a reflection on the sustainability of European consumption patterns** and support measures helping to decrease European demand for raw materials.

iii. Upholding Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence

With the "First Omnibus package" published on 26 February 2025, the European Commission aims to simplify sustainability reporting requirements and to reduce

bureaucratic complexity for businesses by amending several key pieces of legislation adopted under the framework of the European Green Deal, including the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and the Taxonomy Regulation.

COMECE, alongside other faith-based and civil society actors, has long advocated for the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD),** which was finally adopted in 2024 as a crucial step in ensuring that companies prevent human rights abuses and environmental harm throughout their supply chains, and that victims of such abuses are guaranteed effective access to justice.

As recently highlighted in a Position Paper of the COMECE Secretariat, despite the legitimate need for regulatory simplification to support European companies against pressures from the global economy, the proposed amendments must not go beyond this objective, since otherwise they risk undermining the integrity of the landmark due diligence law, which could have profoundly negative implications for human rights and environmental protection, as well as for the EU's credibility as a champion of ensuring corporate responsibility. The **competitiveness of European businesses must not come at the expense of transparency, accountability, and the EU's social and environmental commitments**. In the context of the on-going negotiations on the First Omnibus Package, the European institutions should therefore ensure that the spirit and the intentions of the EU's key sustainability laws, notably the CSDDD, are not undermined, but maintained.

Looking ahead, **caution** must also be exercised with regard to possible future 'omnibus' simplification packages. **Simplification must not become a pretext for excessive deregulation** that weakens important standards and commitments, including in areas such as sustainability and human rights. At stake are not only legal norms, but the coherence of EU policies, the credibility of its global leadership and the fundamental values that underpin the European project.

iv. Stepping up resources for and engagement with fragile countries

The objectives of the EU's redefined economic foreign policy raise concerns that the Union would rather focus its global engagement on countries and regions, where it sees an economic or geostrategic interest, while the **EU's presence, its solidarity initiatives and development cooperation** would diminish **with lower-income and more fragile countries**. Such an investment-driven and transactional approach would be all the more worrying, as 1.1 billion people live in acute poverty worldwide, with 40% living in countries experiencing war and fragility.

In this regard, we would like to recall the collective commitment of the EU and its Member States to provide at least 0.7% of their Gross National Income as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.20% as ODA to the Least Developed Countries. Nevertheless, despite being a leading collective provider of ODA, several EU Member States have recently cut their ODA allocations or they counted as ODA also the funding of activities that fall outside the core purpose of ODA. The year 2024 saw the biggest ODA decline ever, as total ODA fell by 7.1% in real terms compared to 2023, while the ODA from the 22 Development Assistance Committee countries that are EU Member States, fell by 8.6%. Only four EU countries exceeded the 0.7% GNI target in 2024. Moreover, the ODA to the Least Developed Countries dropped by 3%, while

humanitarian aid fell by 9.6% in 2024. ODA simulation models provided by OECD predict that if the current downward trend continues, ODA could fall by 9% to 17% between 2024 and 2025, if countries keep reducing their allocations. These are very alarming figures and tendencies, all the more as we have got off track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

In view of the upcoming proposal of the European Commission on a new Multiannual Financial Framework and the following inter-institutional negotiations, it is therefore paramount to **uphold the EU's credibility as a global leader in promoting sustainable development** and to respect the EU Treaty commitments (cf. Art 21(2) d TEU: "*foster the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty*"). The post-2027 MFF should ensure a well-resourced heading for EU's external action, this all the more as the US is retreating from its global commitments. Based on calculations, in order for the EU and its Member States to meet the 0.7% GNI target by 2030, the EU's ODA budget would need to amount to at least €200 bn for seven years.

Moreover, the various external action funding instruments should not be merged into one, but kept separate since each instrument serves a distinct purpose. Pre-accession assistance should primarily serve the transformation of candidate countries on their path to a future EU membership. Humanitarian action must remain impartial, neutral and independent, while seeking effective linkages to other policy areas as part of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. **Development funding** must have the **promotion of human development** as well as **poverty and inequalities reduction at its core**, including investment in accessible and affordable health services, quality education, nutrition, decent housing, inclusive digitalisation and social protection. Funding for development should also not be diverted towards objectives that fall outside the core purpose of ODA, such as border management, restrictive migration policies or expenditure linked to security and defence.

On the one hand, it is positive that the EU has been moving away from a 'donor-recipient' approach towards a more partnership-based cooperation in recent years. On the other hand, however, an **investment-oriented approach** to development, such as promoted by the EU Global Gateway initiative, may **not be appropriate to replace policies aimed at the provision of basic services to meet urgent needs**, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, low-income countries and least development countries. In such contexts, grant-based support may be a more suitable and effective approach. A largely investment-oriented approach may also not be suitable to substitute initiatives aiming to **support good governance and the rule of law** in EU's partner countries.

While being both predictable and flexible, the next MFF should follow the principle of **'Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development'** to ensure consistency within and between various MFF programmes. The next MFF, particularly the programmes devoted to international cooperation and humanitarian action, should also foresee adequate funding opportunities and enhanced access for **local civil society organisations, including faith-based actors**, promoting their **meaningful involvement** in the design and implementation of respective projects. These local actors often fill the gap left by ineffective state structures and provide essential social

services, drive sustainable development at the grassroots and amplify marginalised voices.

As public services are underfunded worldwide, many countries of the 'Global South' lack access to sufficient liquidity due to **external debt**. Today, over 100 countries are facing a debt crisis, with 60% of low-income countries in or near debt distress, and 3.3 billion people living in nations where debt repayments outpace investments in public services. Governments of those countries are forced to spend more on repayments, especially to creditors like China and private banks, than on essential services like healthcare, education and climate action. Moreover, the international financial architecture is currently unable to provide the necessary resources to the world's weakest economies. As called for by Caritas Internationalis in its 2025 Jubilee Campaign 'Turn Debt into Hope', we also urge European decision-makers to **take decisive action towards debt relief and restructuring of unjust and unsustainable debts** for struggling nations, without imposing harmful economic conditions on their populations. We also plead for a long-term reform towards **a just and sustainable financial system**, and for the creation of **a fair global debt framework**.

v. Promoting engagement with local actors

In the light of the inter-connectedness of today's world realities, the EU should promote a new way of engaging with non-governmental actors, including the civil society and religious communities, a form of a 'multilateralism from below', as proposed by late Pope Francis to "*compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, and its lack of attention to fundamental human rights*". Many faith-based organisations (**FBOs**) do not only function **as networks of faith, trust and hope**, but they are also among the **key frontline operational field actors**, maintaining their grassroots presence and closeness to the needs of local populations, while providing essential services and fostering the resilience of local communities during all stages of a conflict cycle, even if state structures are lacking or failing. By way of example, the Catholic Church is one of the largest non-State providers of education in the world, open to all irrespectively of their religious beliefs. Estimates suggest that in 2020, Catholic academic institutions served nearly 68 million children globally, out of which 27 million in Africa.

A more systematic and enhanced engagement with such actors may help to increase the efficiency of EU's external action by enabling assistance to directly reach persons and groups in situations of vulnerability, in emergency settings or in remote areas. Building upon several recent Resolutions of the European Parliament, the EU could engage more in partnerships with local FBOs in a number of areas, such as development cooperation, education or peacebuilding. Moreover, we would encourage a more systematic implementation of the provision in the current EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, stipulating that the EU should "*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, and find synergies with ongoing UN initiatives*".

4. Conclusion

The changes in the geopolitical landscape present a serious challenge to the European project of integration and peace. A **robust and coordinated response is required at all levels** to safeguard the European common good and ensure comprehensive security. This is by no means solely a technocratic or financial undertaking. It demands thoughtful reflection based on the **founding vision of peace**, generating **creative solutions** and **cultivating resilience** in the face of difficult circumstances.

From the outset, the Catholic Church has strongly supported the process of European integration - one that is rooted in the principles of **solidarity and subsidiarity,** and that reflects a vision of the **common good** which upholds **human dignity** in all its dimensions, while calling for **responsible and far-sighted political action.** Europe is not merely, and certainly not primarily, an economic or political project; it is, above all, **a moral project** (attributed to Jean Monnet).

What, then, should be the European Union's unique contribution to the world of today and of tomorrow?

If the EU is to remain a credible global actor, it should not seek to reclaim political dominance or geographical centrality, nor should its contribution be reduced solely to providing economic and technological solutions. The EU's distinctiveness should lie above all in its identity as a true **'union in diversity'**, one that constantly **renews its commitment to the spirit of its founding vision** and develops further its **capacity for initiative in pursuit of practical solidarity and peace**, both among its members and in its relations with the wider world.

Reflecting on the direction Europe was taking, late Pope Francis said: *"I dream of a Europe, the heart of the West, which employs its immense talents to settling conflicts and lighting lamps of hope; a Europe capable of recovering its youthful heart, looking to the greatness of the whole and beyond its immediate needs; a Europe inclusive of peoples and persons, together with their own cultures, without chasing after ideologies and forms of ideological colonisation. This helps to bring us back to the dream of the founders of the European Union. They had a great dream!"*

Brussels, 23 June 2025

the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Its permanent General Secretariat, based in Brussels, analyses EU policies on a day-by-day basis, striving to bring the specific contribution of the Catholic Church into the European debate.

The COMECE Commission on EU External Relations monitors and prepares statements, contributions and activities to the ongoing EU policy and public debates on the EU External Action. The Commission seeks to promote the global role of the EU as a leading actor for sustainable human development and peace. In dialogue with EU institutions, the Commission closely accompanies the EU's foreign & security policy, trade policy, neighbourhood & enlargement policy, as well as the promotion of human rights and sustainable development in the world. The members of this Commission are experts in the above-mentioned fields nominated by the EU Bishops' Conferences.