



**Speech by the President of COMECE H.E. Mgr. Mariano Crociata during
the high-level conference *"Peacebuilding in Europe: what role for
catholic social thought and universal values?"***

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In the current phase of profound disruption of the international order that emerged after the Second World War, a widespread sense of disorientation has taken hold. Many perceive a growing distance from a world that no longer appears familiar or stable. In this context, the initiative of the Centesimus Annus Pro-Pontifice Foundation on peace in Europe is particularly timely and necessary. Its value lies in its ability to look beyond the immediate situation, in which the war in Ukraine continues after four years of uninterrupted conflict, and to challenge the perception that the present state of affairs is inevitable. Overcoming this sense of inevitability is essential in order to restore the capacity to envisage a future and to mobilise new ideas and energies oriented towards peace.

It is therefore essential to move beyond expressions of hope or the reiteration of principles alone. While the condemnation of violations of international and humanitarian law and concern over the weakening of multilateralism remain necessary, they are not sufficient. What is required is a renewed commitment to rebuilding a credible and stable framework for international relations grounded in shared values and effective cooperation.

A first priority is the restoration of confidence in fundamental principles and values whose significance appears to have been eroded. One of the most serious consequences of war in Europe and along its borders is the loss of hope in the possibility of re-establishing an ordered system of relations and conditions of peaceful coexistence. Reaffirming trust in this possibility is a prerequisite for any meaningful action. From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, this rests on the recognition of the deep interconnection between personal responsibility, the life of primary communities, the role of intermediary bodies, public opinion, and political decision-making at national, European, and international levels. The reawakening of individual and collective conscience is therefore an urgent task and a necessary condition for restoring confidence in the future of the countries affected by conflict and of Europe as a whole.

Beyond ideological polarisation, which increasingly characterises public debate within European societies, there is a need to recover a shared sense of humanity. War

systematically reduces vast numbers of people to inhuman living conditions on all sides of the conflict. The objective is not to provoke temporary emotional reactions, but to cultivate a stable and informed awareness of the suffering endured by persons whose dignity is equal to our own. Such suffering is not only physical, but also psychological and social, affecting in particular children, older persons, families, and all those whose ordinary lives of work, education, and care have been disrupted or made impossible.

This renewed sense of humanity must translate into a broad-based commitment to peace, capable of transcending social, cultural, and political divisions. It should foster a collective determination to bring an end to violence and to support concrete forms of solidarity. In the immediate term, this includes humanitarian assistance; in the longer term, it requires coordinated efforts aimed at rebuilding physical infrastructure, social cohesion, and economic opportunities, enabling individuals and communities affected by war to regain conditions of dignity and participation. In line with the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, such efforts should involve a wide range of actors, including economic stakeholders, educational and research institutions, civil society organisations, and faith-based organisations, each contributing according to their specific competencies.

The mobilisation of intermediary bodies and organised forms of solidarity can play a decisive role in shaping the social and political climate. This task is particularly challenging in a context marked by social fragmentation, competing narratives, and a growing tendency towards individualism and withdrawal into private life. These dynamics risk fostering indifference to the suffering of others. The current moment is marked by a troubling contradiction: the re-emergence of power politics and the primacy of force over law, alongside a weakening of collective moral responsibility. Addressing this contradiction requires a renewed commitment to the core principles that underpin both European integration and Catholic social teaching: the inherent dignity and uniqueness of every person; the central role of families and primary communities; social relations founded on justice and truth; the participation of all in social and economic life; and the pursuit of the common good through both personal responsibility and effective institutions.

Within this framework, the European Union faces a particularly significant challenge. Persistent social and cultural fragmentation within Member States, together with divisions among them, undermines the Union's capacity to act coherently and credibly. A lack of unity not only exposes the EU to external geopolitical pressures, but also weakens public trust in its institutions and their ability to respond to legitimate economic, social, and cultural expectations. The European Union possesses substantial cultural, scientific, technological, and economic resources. However, without a shared strategic vision and a renewed commitment to cooperation, this potential risks being dissipated.

Ultimately, the EU's ability to contribute effectively to the resolution of ongoing conflicts, and to the construction of a just and lasting peace, depends on its capacity to align its policies and actions with the fundamental values on which it is founded. Strengthening unity, promoting solidarity, and placing the dignity of the human person at the centre of European action are not only ethical imperatives, but also essential conditions for peace and stability in Europe and beyond.