



**Keynote speech at the FCAPP International Conference**  
*“Peacebuilding in Europe: Political Integration as a Path to Peace”*  
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In the years when what would later become the European Union began to take shape — between the late 1940s and the early 1950s — peace was felt almost as a physical necessity. The devastation caused by the war was immense, and poverty was so widespread that reconstruction and recovery from the social and economic consequences became an imperative shared by all. It became necessary to come together, to unite in the effort of rebuilding. Some enlightened believers understood that bonds had to be created in order to prevent the return of war. Thus, from the need for peace, a common path emerged, developing enormously, mainly in the economic sphere, and giving rise to decades of peace that have endured until our own time — at least until a few years ago. We may say that the need for peace generated and shaped a unity among a group of European countries, which gradually expanded to include an ever-growing number of others.

Today, however, we seem to have awakened into a reversed condition. The long period of peace — the longest Europe has ever known — has had a numbing effect on many consciences, leading people to believe that war would never return. Yet it did. And faced with the return of war, we have realised firsthand that we had culpably neglected to nurture unity and to strive for greater unity — indeed, to seek something beyond mere economic unity (which itself remains incomplete). We now see that peace is under threat, but also that unity itself is becoming increasingly fragile. There have not been lacking significant recent signs of convergence, such as the steadfast support for Ukraine since it suffered military invasion by Russia. Nevertheless, the European Union’s difficulty in finding a common line on many issues is evident.

Unfortunately, the enormous variety of national sensitivities among the different countries has become increasingly pronounced, made even more evident and threatening by the spread of populist movements and sovereigntist governments claiming they can achieve alone what the European Union as a whole would in any case struggle to accomplish. Only a few seem able to recognise the necessity of standing together in order to confront the enormous challenges arising not only from the danger of wars spreading further, but also from economic inequalities between countries and within individual nations, and from the need to face the resulting economic consequences of geopolitical change. All this is taking place within a global

situation that has lost every multilateral point of reference and is increasingly at the mercy of a few powers seeking to manage international relations through force, if not outright violence and war — wars themselves fought in total disregard for what once was, and what should still remain, international law and the law governing armed conflict. The consequence for the European Union is that precisely at the moment when it ought to possess the cohesion necessary to address all the challenges of this phase of global disorder, it is instead experiencing its greatest difficulties in achieving substantial political unity, something that many have long called for.

To achieve such an objective, at least two conditions would be necessary. The first is the elementary recognition that, without unity among all, no single EU country would have the capacity to withstand an external attack. And if any of them nurtures the illusion of establishing a privileged relationship with a great power, it can be certain of entering into a condition of dependence, whatever form that may take, with all the consequences this would entail. The second condition is the rediscovery of the Union's origins, encapsulated in the EU motto: *United in diversity*, and in the pairing of solidarity and subsidiarity. The achievement of genuine political unity, capable of expressing a common foreign policy and common defence, should come through a shared awareness that only by forming a united whole can those very interests truly be protected which populists and sovereigntists claim can be secured through the isolation and closure of individual nations.

In reality, unity among EU countries is the best way to safeguard the identity and sovereignty of individual nations. This conviction ought to be shared by our peoples, because only from a widespread need for and sense of unity will there arise the pursuit of a peace which, in today's world, only Europe is capable of advancing. Europe must not only establish legitimate and proportionate deterrence, but above all make the most of the living part of the continent's historical heritage: its culture, its capacity for dialogue, its diplomatic initiative, its technological development, and its still significant economic strength despite everything.

In all this, the Church remains a unique point of reference and bulwark in the living conscience and the multifaceted effort to achieve and preserve peace in justice and truth. Nor has it failed — nor will it fail — to contribute to this twofold purpose: unity and peace in Europe.