



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

SPEECH  
02/10/2026

### International Conference “Civilizational Foundations of Europe and 1700 Yars of Christianity in Georgia”

*Session 1: Christian values in Europe in time of crisis: the approach of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty and the contribution of Orthodoxy*

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The 1,700th anniversary of the official presence of Christianity in Georgia forms the backdrop to our reflection and indeed inspires it – not as a ritual celebration, but in the firm conviction that this anniversary speaks to the present day, perhaps with even greater urgency than in the recent past. It is no coincidence that the title of this session describes ours as a time of crisis. And in the face of crisis, we cannot give way to empty rhetoric; rather, we must take the measures needed to overcome the difficulties. For this reason, the first reference must be to the role of religions and churches, and then to that of parliamentary and European institutions. In this respect, Article 17 of the TFEU plays no small part, since it represents the most authoritative and institutional affirmation of the recognition of the role of religions and churches in individual countries and in their relations with the European Union.

Because this is a time of profound upheaval, the concern to find adequate conditions for facing the crisis must give rise to an understanding that goes beyond a formal dialogue or mere statutory compliance. How such a dialogue can best be conducted is not immediately obvious. It needs to rest on the best possible premises in order to be productive. This requires institutions to recognise the value of religions and churches, in accordance with the provisions of Article 17, and religions and churches to free themselves from narrow and partisan concerns. Precisely because crisis is the hallmark of our time, the common concern must instead turn to whatever can best help to overcome it. And a crisis such as the present one does not concern just some, but involves everyone, believers and non-believers alike, since it is society as a whole that is affected by the processes of transformation under way – whether we are speaking of wars, of migratory movements, or of technology and Artificial Intelligence.

For these reasons, religions and churches need to rediscover the deep roots of their heritage and of their religious history, thanks to which the distinctive gifts of each

confession – as the history of our host country bears witness – will be able to express all their richness in harmony and exchange with all others. What is needed, in the face of a crisis that is a crisis of meaning and of values, is to make available and offer a resource of meaning of immense value, such as religious experience – and for us, Christian experience – capable of reweaving the threads of a social fabric that is now frayed and on the verge of unravelling. It is essential that this happen as a free offer to an equally free choice, whose persuasive power comes from the inner strength that flows from the experience and conscience of the people and communities who have made it their own.

Recognising the Christian roots of Europe – as the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, did not fail to reaffirm in his address in Metz in recent days, during his pastoral visit to France – does not ask us to wield them as a banner; rather, it entrusts us with the task of explaining the reasons underlying a historical experience that is unique of its kind, precisely because it drew its inspiration and its social and institutional form from Christianity. This explains why the formula of shared sovereignty in certain areas, and the intention to overcome conflict through reconciliation and cooperation, were born in the European context and not elsewhere. This simple fact shows how important it is to reach a common understanding around this essential core, free from the animosity and ideological conflict that ultimately harm everyone.

It must be acknowledged that the conditions exist to develop the dialogue in this way and to overcome preconceived objections, even in the presence of questionable attitudes and choices. In recent years we have taken part in events at which – in particular at one high-level meeting – representatives of religions and churches were explicitly asked for help in the face of the outbreak of wars and conflicts that, sadly, are still continuing. Clearly, at particularly alarming moments it becomes necessary to seek help from anyone able to offer it; and yet, on the part of religions and churches, we have a responsibility to offer responsible and effective engagement, truly representative of a religious and ecclesial world which, we must humbly admit, also knows its share of weariness and slowness.

We are faced with an appeal that rises from reality, and above all from a multitude of the weak and fragile who have no one to turn to, and even more so from crowds who feel lost, like sheep without a shepherd, as the Gospel says. We can do a great deal, both within and beyond the spaces offered by institutional dialogue. We must focus on these after having attended to everything else, which is in fact all that comes before them from a spiritual, pastoral and cultural point of view.

The context in which our meeting is taking place, especially considering the role of its promoters, suggests adding a specific reflection on the mission of parliaments. If I may offer a thought on this, I would say that what you represent is something truly extraordinary, since it gives voice to the social, political, cultural and religious forces

expressed by the Orthodox tradition, and does so precisely within a parliamentary institution that links, across borders, different histories and countries united by the deep sentiment of their peoples. This is a resource of singular value that needs to be put into effect with appropriate choices and methods. The crucial point of this parliamentary movement lies in its capacity to interpret the peoples who express and create it and, at the same time, in its capacity to lead, to spread culture and to give hope. This would be greatly needed in countries with different historical, cultural and religious traditions as well. The first task, in this sense, is to restore value to values; the European institutions, in particular, must return to the founding values of the Union and give them the centrality that gives a sense of unity and belonging to the peoples who make it up.

The crisis will be overcome if our national communities, our peoples, do not feel abandoned, but begin to perceive themselves as a force of deep cohesion and unity, able to look ahead with confidence and hope even in a world that is often hostile and threatening. We must therefore offer our wholehearted encouragement to what has been set in motion here in these days, because from here it can gain ever greater effectiveness, in relationship and dialogue with the European institutions and with the other countries of the continent, and then extend beyond our borders as well.