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Press Conference for the presentation of the Dialogue “(Re) Thinking Europe. A Christian contribution to the future of Project Europe” (Vatican, 27-29 October 2017)

At 11.30 this morning, at the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held for the presentation of the Dialogue *(Re) Thinking Europe. A Christian contribution to the future of Project Europe*, organized in the Vatican by the Commission of Episcopal Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), in collaboration with the Secretariat of State, whose meeting begins this afternoon and concludes on 29 October.

Representatives of the Church and high level European political leaders will participate in the Dialogue, to contribute to a constructive reflection on the fundamental challenges for the European project.

The speakers at the press conference were His Eminence Cardinal Reinhard Marx, archbishop of München und Freising (Federal Republic of Germany), president of the Commission of Episcopal Conferences of the European Union (COMECE); and H.E. Msgr. Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States.

The following is the intervention by Cardinal Reinhard Marx:

Intervention of Cardinal Reinhard Marx

The European Union, and all of Europe, are facing major challenges (not limited to Europe alone) in relation to which citizens expect from politicians and politics, if not conclusive answers, at least clear objectives and prospects. I will list just a few of these challenges:

- Climate change and the resulting need to change our non-sustainable lifestyle in the medium term. Connected to this is also the problem of the costs of ecological change and their distribution.
- Increasing changes in the world of work through digitization, robotic technology, precarious employment relationships and, in particular, high youth unemployment in the individual countries. Linked to this is the

fundamental question of the value of man's work and dignity.

- The migration movements that have emerged in the so-called “refugee crisis”. People seek security and shelter from war and terror, and seek better living conditions and better opportunities than they can find in their homeland, which does not seem to offer them any prospects. The causes of these migratory movements are many, and are to be sought also in Europe, in our lifestyle that is often at the expense of others. Sustainable solutions and responses require thorough examination.

Faced with these great challenges, there is a tendency to look for responses in the past, in a misunderstood return to proven solutions, which is often only a nostalgia and romantic transfiguration of the past. It is also an expression of the populist currents, and looks backward. But this is not our perspective: ours is not a retrospective look that beautifies reality, but rather a lucid examination of the present and, above all, the future. For this reason, the motto of our dialogue is “(Re) thinking Europe”.

The European Union, the “Project Europe”, has achieved great results: over the past 60 years, it has contributed fundamentally to peace, solidarity, growth and progress in Europe. At the same time, many EU citizens have developed a detached attitude: the EU appears increasingly technocratic; on the one hand, citizens expect everything from “Brussels” (in a consumerist sense) and are disappointed if they do not receive it. On the other hand, they often do not expect anything at all, but at the same time are not willing to make this “Project Europe” their own.

Facing these challenges and complicated situations, this problem presents itself: how can the Church help to find answers, and what can she do? We do not have ready responses and solutions, and we do not have a concrete policy. But we believe that EU citizens, with their different experiences, their different expectations and with their rich and diverse capacities, should be brought back to the centre of “Project Europe” and be able to be its agents.

This is also the content and purpose of this meeting in Rome: we want to re-engage dialogue between politicians and representatives of the Church, as well as between representatives of social organizations, Europe and the European Union, regarding expectations, hopes, and also disappointments. The main question is: what can we do, and what do we want to do, to live together in this Europe and to carry forward “Project Europe”?

That is why this event is not a “classic congress”, but rather a dialogue; following an introductory discussion on the topics listed by Pope Francis in his speech at the award of the Charlemagne Prize:

- “Integration” (with fractures and lacerations both within and between EU Member States);
- “Dialogue” has been typical of our western democracies;
- “Capacity to generate” (what form of economic model we will need in the future).

We will continue the debate in small groups, so as to hear as many interventions as possible and to have the active participation of all involved.

These analyses, ideas and proposals will be collected and discussed further. This meeting in Rome is not the end of a process of reflection and debate on Europe and the EU, but a beginning: we will continue the discussion in the presidency of the COMECE and in the General Assembly, and we will continue to intensify the dialogue at different levels – between the Church (the COMECE) and politics (Europe).

At the conclusion of our meeting we expect the encouragement and support of Pope Francis, to continue this dialogue with looking to the future of Europe (and of the European Union). To return to a comparison used by Pope Francis: in his first speech on Europe before the European Parliament, he portrayed Europe as a weary and exhausted “grandmother”. How can we help to ensure that this exhausted “grandmother” – who despite the

wrinkles of age is a lovable person – is not limited to surveying and defending only what has been reached, but rather delivers to subsequent generations the wealth of her experiences, encouraging them to undertake confidently their own path towards the future? We greatly appreciate the fact that Pope Francis will hold his fifth discourse on Europe and the European Union. So far, all his discourses have given significant departure points for reflection, which guide us in our work in the COMECE and offer words of hope and encouragement to Europe overall.
