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Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin at the Dialogue promoted by COMECE: (Re)Thinking Europe: a Christian contribution to the future of the European Project (Vatican, 27 October 2017)

The following is the speech given yesterday afternoon by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, at the Dialogue promoted by the COMECE: *(Re)Thinking Europe: a Christian contribution to the future of the European project*, taking place on 27 and 28 October in the Vatican's New Synod Hall:

Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Authorities and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I offer all of you a warm welcome and I thank you for being here in such numbers to participate in this *Dialogue* on Europe organized by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), in cooperation with the Secretariat of State.

A particular word of welcome goes to Cardinal Reinhard Marx, President of COMECE, and to the Honourable Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament. I especially thank Mr Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission, and the Honourable Mairead McGuinness, Vice-President of the European Parliament, for their much-appreciated participation. Both the Commission and the Parliament, each in its respective sphere, are privileged partners for the European Bishops in the "open, transparent and regular dialogue",^[1] which the European Union maintains with the Churches.

From the start of his papacy, Pope Francis has shown great interest in the future of Europe, recognizing its historical and cultural heritage, its potential and the challenges it faces in a globalized and rapidly changing world. In recent years, we have witnessed a constant dialogue between the Holy Father and Europe, beginning with his memorable visit to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. I think too of His

Holiness's Audience with the European Union Heads of State and Government on 24 March of this year, and the meeting that will take place tomorrow afternoon.

The outcome of the British referendum last year, and the tendency to fragmentation sweeping the continent, have led the Holy Father to consider the urgent need to promote a more wide-ranging and focused reflection on Europe as a whole and on its future direction, even beyond the confines of the European Union. The Holy See has regarded the project of European integration with interest and respect from the beginning, and has deemed it opportune to be associated with the initiative promoted by COMECE and to take part in this *dialogue* between the ecclesial communities and the members of civil society. Its participation in this meeting is prompted by a desire to serve Europe; the Holy See is not indifferent to the continent's problems and future, and is always willing to offer its own contribution for the good of Europe's peoples.

In the third part of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, entitled "*The common good and peace in society*",^[2] Pope Francis identified four principles "which can guide the development of life in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit".^[3] These principles are certainly applicable to this moment of dialogue, which should attempt to identify, in the first place, the fundamental questions that Europe needs to ask in order to face the challenges of the future.

Along these lines, we should keep in mind that *time is greater than space*. We have gathered to initiate a process, not "to obtain... immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness".^[4] We have come here in the conviction that *unity prevails over conflict*. The founding fathers of the European project gave us an eloquent proof of this when they realized that the pooling of resources and cooperative effort were the true remedy against new deadly conflicts like those that marred the first half of the twentieth century. In our conversations, we do not want to forget that *realities are more important than ideas*, for "ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action. What calls us to action are realities illuminated by reason".^[5] Consequently, we must never lose sight of reality, which is seen primarily in the actual faces of the men and women living on our continent, each with his or her own share of potential and pain. All too evident, in fact, is the growing malaise that pervades our age as a result of abstract models being imposed from on high. Finally, let us not forget that *the whole is greater than the part*, and is also "greater than the sum of [the] parts".^[6] The integration that has gradually been achieved is more than a lump sum of languages and cultures. In this sense, I consider it vitally important to recall one of the central tenets of the Pope's thinking on Europe: "The founding fathers remind us that Europe is not a conglomeration of rules to obey, or a manual of protocols and procedures to follow. It is a way of life, a way of understanding man based on his transcendent and inalienable dignity".^[7]

I have mentioned these four principles dear to Pope Francis, because I think it useful to suggest a method for these days. Our dialogue would prove less effective if it failed to start from people's daily life and to face the future with a vision capable of showing a way forward rather than simply devising immediate solutions to contingent problems. This, in fact, is precisely the starting point of the three discussions that will follow this afternoon, drawing on the Holy Father's address at the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize. On that occasion, the Pope made an appeal to take up the "challenge of 'updating' the idea of Europe. A Europe capable of giving birth to a new humanism based on three capacities: the capacity to integrate, the capacity for dialogue and the capacity to generate".^[8]

In approaching the discussion, it might be helpful to keep in mind some questions raised by the Pope's speech; they summarize his concerns in the current context, beginning with the various problems facing Europe. These problems include the economic crisis that has marked the last decade, the dramatic issue of migration, the conflicts rending not only the Mediterranean area but other parts of the continent as well, the advance of populism and the return of nationalism, unemployment, the concerns of the young and environmental issues.

In the face of these challenges, Europe has given "a general impression of weariness and ageing".^[9] "So what is the interpretative key for reading the difficulties of the present and finding answers for the future?"^[10] How do we recover memory in order to give hope for the future?^[11] What is our hope for the Europe of today and of

tomorrow?[12]

Central to these questions is the issue of how to recover the idea of a Europe centred on the person, with his or her impulse to fraternity and yearning for truth and justice.[13] That in turn raises the more general issue of human dignity, which leads Pope Francis to ask further questions: “What kind of dignity is there without the possibility of freely expressing one’s thought or professing one’s religious faith? What dignity can there be without a clear juridical framework which limits the rule of force and enables the rule of law to prevail over the power of tyranny? What dignity can a person ever hope to find when he or she lacks food and the bare essentials for survival and, worse still, when they lack the work which confers dignity?”[14]

Particularly close to the Pope’s heart are the problem of employment and the issues associated with young people and their prospects for the future. “How can we avoid losing our young people, who end up going elsewhere in search of their dreams and a sense of belonging, because [...] we do not know how to offer them opportunities and values?”[15] These questions raise other basic issues that Pope Francis addresses head on: “What kind of culture does Europe propose today?”[16] Where is that vigour, that idealism which inspired and ennobled its history? Where is its spirit of curiosity and enterprise, and the thirst for truth that it shared so passionately with the world?[17]

I will not go on at greater length about these questions, because the Honourable Pat Cox will rightly define the subject of our dialogue at the end of this opening ceremony. Still, I have sought to raise some points that can serve to prompt a discussion that I hope will prove both lively and profound. After all, everyone in this hall is called to do his or her part, in accordance with their own responsibilities, in building up the common good and in promoting peace and harmony. The European project is undoubtedly a human work. As such, it has its limitations and can always be perfected. Precisely for this reason, it deserves our careful consideration. As Christians, we want to make our contribution inspired and sustained by our faith. Driven by the desire to seek the city of God, we do not want to forget the importance of building and strengthening the community of man.[18]

Thank you.

[1] Cf. Art. 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

[2] FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 217-237.

[3] Ibid., 221.

[4] Ibid., 224.

[5] Ibid., 232.

[6] Ibid., 235.

[7] FRANCIS, *Address to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union*, 24 March 2017.

[8] ID., *Address on the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize*, 6 May 2016.

[9] FRANCIS, *Address to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014.

[10] *Address to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union*, cit.

[11] Cf. *ibid.*

[12] Cf. *ibid.*

[13] Cf. *ibid.*; also A. DE GASPERI, *La nostra patria Europa. Discorso alla Conferenza Parlamentare Europea*, 21 April 1954.

[14] *Address to the European Parliament*, cit.

[15] *Address on the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize*, cit.

[16] *Address to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union*, cit.

[17] Cf. FRANCIS, *Address to the Council of Europe*, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014.

[18] Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 42.