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Letter to The European Union

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in the framework of the 2024 European Day**

Dearest European Union,


to address to you as a friend is quite unusual, spontaneous though as we have grown up with you. You are our "Europe" entailing 27 countries and 450 million inhabitants that have freely chosen to build together the Union that you have become. That is absolutely wonderful! Instead of fighting or ignoring each other, we have decided to get to know each other and to get along together! We are aware that it is not always easy, but how decisive it is to work together and to erase barriers and defenses instead of putting them up. You are our home, our first common home, in which we learn to live as 'All Brothers', just like it has been written by one of your children whose parents went to the 'end of the world' to seek for a future.

A desire in our heart

We are writing to you as we have a desire in our heart: that what you represent and what you are can be strengthened, that we all learn to feel you close to us, to feel you as a friend and not far nor unknown. You need this because people often speak badly of you, and many forget how many important things you do! During COVID, this has become visible: only together could we face pandemics. Unfortunately, we only realize this when we are overwhelmed by necessity, and then we easily forget it! So, when we think we can do it on our own we end up all against all.

From the onset to today

We cannot forget how, before you, we had been fighting for centuries endless wars whereby millions of people were killed. All dreams of peace have been shattered on the rocks of wars, the last world wars, that have brought immense destruction and death. It



was out of the tragedy of the Second World War - which reached absolute evil with the *Shoah* and the threat to the survival of all mankind with the atomic bomb - that the seed of the current community of sovereign countries the European Union was born. Some believed that nations were not destined to fight each other, that after so much hatred we could learn to live together. Among those who thought about this project and did want it, we cannot forget Robert Schuman, a Frenchman, Konrad Adenauer, a German, and Alcide De Gasperi, an Italian: animated by Christian faith, they felt the call to create something that would make war impossible again onto the European soil. Their thought has been smart, ambitious and courageous. Some steps proved to be difficult, but the strength that comes from unity showed the value of the path taken and the possibility of correcting, adjusting and understanding.

The European Community was built in 1951 on coal and steel, the indispensable materials for making war. The purpose of this Community's founders was to prevent any attempt to use these materials against each other again. In fact, those three great men and many others with them sought for more, namely reconciliation between peoples and the erasing of hatred and revenge.


The identification of a center to work together on – event if of economic nature to start - as shown by the treaties signed in Rome in 1957, was the beginning: progressively over this path more and more peoples gradually join the Community up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and 1992 when a new name was given to it, the European Union; then the enlargement wave in 2004 including at once ten new countries of the then Warsaw Pact. Issues were also to be addressed. Nevertheless, major novelties were introduced such as the single currency and the removal of national barriers to the free movement of people and good and also the agreed reform to the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009.

Togetherness

Dearest European Union, you are a living body, so perhaps the time has come for new institutional reforms in order to allow you taking up today's challenges. You cannot just be a bureaucracy, necessary though to organizations - as complex as the one you have become – to function. Directives and regulations alone do not enhance cohesion. You need a soul! In recent years, significant steps forward have been done, such as, for example, when you have helped some countries to overcome their economic crises; alternatively, periods of stalemate and difficulties have been endured. These grow when we lose togetherness and the vision of our shared future or when we oppose against realizing that our destiny is common and that we need to keep on building a united Europe.

War is back

That is why sometimes we wonder: Europe, where are you? Where are you heading to? These are also the Pope's questions: "With deep love for Europe, and in the spirit of dialogue that distinguishes this continent, we might ask her: "Where are you sailing, if you are not showing the world paths of peace, creative ways for bringing an end to the war in Ukraine and to the many other conflicts causing so much bloodshed?" Or again, to widen the scope, we might ask: "West, on what course are you sailing?" (*Speech, Lisbon, 2nd August 2023*).



Throughout these years we have changed a lot and find it hard to understand and keep the spirit of the beginnings alive. After such a long period of peace, we thought that a war on the European soil would now be impossible. Instead, the last two years show us that what seemed unthinkable is back. We need to take up again the project of the founding fathers and build new peace pacts if we want the war against Ukraine to end, just like the ongoing war in the Middle East, which broke out following the terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October, besides never defeated and now re-emerging anti-Semitism. The Italian Constitution states this clearly, too: it is necessary to fight against war and repudiate it concretely!

If peace is not cared, there will always be the risk of war around. This is what Robert Schuman shared in his Declaration of 9 May 1950, starting point of the European integration process: "A united Europe was not achieved and we had war". He was referring to the past, but his words are applicable today, too. Unity must be sought as an always new and urgent task. We do not have to wait for the outbreak of another conflict to understand it!


The international role and the nationalistic temptation

What role do you play, Europe, in the world? We want you to be able to have an impact and bring forward your willingness for peace, the tools of your diplomacy, your values. Awaken your strength so that your voice can be heard, so that new balances and international relations can be established. Your internal divisions do not allow you to assume the role that would be expected from your historical and cultural stature. Do you not see the risk that your internal divisions weaken not only your international weight but also your capacity to meet your peoples' expectations?

So many are the ones that think they can enjoy the benefits you have undoubtedly brought, as if they could be taken for granted and nothing could jeopardize them. The pandemic or the periodic protests, most recently the one of the farmers, unpleasantly shakes us. We become aware that so many acquired advantages could vanish. The sense of necessity, however, is not enough to push everyone to overcome divisions. Some would push to believe that we would be better off in isolation, whereas any one of your countries, even a large one, would be fatally reduced to the weakest position. To remain together we need shared motivations, common ideals and values that are appreciated and cultivated. Economic interests are not sufficient as, in the long run, the reasons for togetherness need to be perceived as the only ones that can overcome tensions and contrasts that economic interests bring with them in their intrinsic confrontation.

Pope Francis said: "At this historical juncture, Europe is crucial, for thanks to its history, it represents *the memory of humanity*; in this sense, it is called to take up its proper role, which is to unite those far apart, to welcome other peoples and to refuse to consider anyone an eternal enemy. It is vital, then, *to recover the European spirit*". (Speech, Budapest, 28th April 2023).

Dearest Europe, we would like everyone to feel the pride of belonging to you. Today, anything lying beyond the borders of one's own country seems to be far, sometimes foreign. Yet, both our joint national and the European soul belong to one another. From the onset you have been the Union of free and sovereign countries that ceased part of their sovereignty in favor of a common and stronger one. Therefore, no identity, no freedom of



anyone is lessened; on the contrary, the safeguard of everyone' autonomy within a structured and loyal relationship with all the others is ensured.

European values and Christian faith

Dearest Europe, your ideas and our values define your face. The Christian faith has provided with a significant contribution to this, too, all the more so since the original project and design of your Union emerged from its Christian sentiment. As Christians, we unceasingly feel a deep responsibility for this and we find in you so much care for the dignity of the person, which the Gospel of Christ has sown in our hearts and in your culture. Therefore, we suffer while seeing that you are afraid of life, do not know how to defend it and welcome it from its beginning to its end, and do not always encourage the growth of population.

"I think of a Europe - says the Pope - that is not hostage to its parts, neither falling prey to self-referential forms of populism nor resorting to a fluid, if not vapid, "supranationalism" that loses sight of the life of its peoples. [...] How much better it would be to build a Europe centred on the human person and on its peoples, with effective policies for natality and the family [...], a Europe whose different nations would form a single family that protects the growth and uniqueness of each of its members". (*Speech, Budapest, 28th April 2023*).


Migrants and related topics and implications

Dearest Europe, you cannot just look inwards. You cannot live just to feel good; you need to feel good enough to help the world, to combat injustice, to fight against poverty. For decades you have been the arrival point, the dream of so many migrants coming from different continents and seeking for a better life within your borders. Many want to come to you because they are desperately looking for a possibility of future. And many other, with their work, aren't they already helping you prepare a better one? It is not a matter of welcoming all but of ensuring that no one is losing his life in the 'journeys of hope' and that many find hospitality. The one that welcomes, generates life! Italy is often left alone, as if this were its own problem only or the problem of just a few, which does not mean that it must close itself off. Sooner or later, we will learn that responsibilities, including the ones towards migrants, can only be shared, to face and solve problems that are indeed common problems.

You represent a point of reference for the Mediterranean and African countries, an immense basin of peoples and resources in the perspective of a partnership of equals. This is an essential task, because in fact a supranational entity such as the Union cannot exist with no mutual international relations that represent and confirm its recognition and historic task, and that promote social and economic progress in the sign of friendship and brotherhood.

Commitments and challenges

Dearest Europe, it is time for a new robust relaunch of your path as a Union towards an ever fuller integration, entailing a as fair as possible European taxation system, an asser-



tive foreign policy, a common defense implying your active international responsibility, an enlargement to the countries that are not yet part of you, a guarantee of a strength that is increasingly proportionate to the unity that you gather and express. The needs for economic and technical innovation (i.e. Artificial Intelligence), of security, of environmental care and custody of the 'common home', of safeguarding welfare and individual and social rights, are some of the challenges that only together can we face and overcome. Unfortunately, dangers are not missing either, such as those arising from misinformation, which threatens the orderly unfolding of democratic life and the very possibility of an undistorted memory and history.

Together with democratically adopted institutional reforms, there is a need to grow a common feeling, a shared appreciation of the values that underpin our coexistence in the European Union. What is needed is a new sense of citizenship, a civic sense with a European outlook, the awareness of the European continent peoples that they are great people. Dearest Europe, we are deeply persuaded of this: it is above all out this sense of togetherness between citizens and peoples that you are asking us to build between us.

Next elections

The upcoming elections for the renewal of the European Parliament and the appointment of the European Commission are a propitious and unrepeatable opportunity, to be seized without hesitation. Unfortunately, fears and a sense of insecurity while facing difficulties often prevail. This should be heard, too, in order to show that it is you the instrument and the place to face and overcome fears and threats.

For all these reasons, we appeal to everyone, candidates and citizens, starting with the 16-year-olds who will be voting for the first time in some countries, to become aware of the importance to ensure this civic gesture embedded in the participation into the Union's life and development. To refrain from vote is not the same as remaining neutral but to give to others the power to act without, if not against, our freedom, on which you'll have then to take your responsibility. Absenteeism has the effect of increasing mistrust of one another, the loss of the opportunity to make one's own contribution to social life. This would in turn cancel any possibility and capacity to improve togetherness within the European Union.

Our wish for you, dearest European Union, is that this electoral round may indeed become an opportunity for revitalization, a reawakening of enthusiasm for a common path that already contains, in itself and in the vision it projects, a lively sense of hope and of motivated and convinced commitment on the part of your citizens.

A new European humanism

Let us therefore dream again with Pope Francis: "With mind and heart, with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith, I dream of a *new European humanism*, one that involves 'a constant work of humanization' and calls for 'memory, courage, [and] a sound and humane utopian vision'". (*Speech*, Vatican, 6th May 2016).