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EUROPE NEEDS A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

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Europe is in conflict. National interests are again taking priority over the European common good. We risk forgetting that the founding of the European Union 61 years ago was a great victory for peace. When the Treaties of Rome were signed back then, it was bound up with the conviction that the great challenges for the future should be faced together. It was a wise and far-sighted decision. At the time, Konrad Adenauer said that the treaties would benefit every member state, for Europe and the world. "If Europe unites, it will not only benefit itself and its states, it will benefit the whole world." Following this decision, Europe gained in attractiveness over the coming decades.

We should reflect on this today, when slogans are declared to promote national interests. Slogans do not replace politics. They offer no perspectives for a European future and no solutions to problems in the member states of the European Union. Slogans are unsettling, they are divisive and can drag us into national isolation. This perspective, which can be seen in many member states, is unsustainable and requires a fundamental re-think if the idea of a European Union has a viable future. This is what I want to talk about: a change of perspective that will continue our efforts for peace and will boost Europe's reputation as a continent of openness and tolerance. This is also a perspective, that arises from the civil societies in Europe and is not perceived as dictated from above, and which is a powerful description of cultural diversity in Europe as a source of European identity, and consolidates Europe's contribution to peace, democracy and freedom in the global world. We are witnessing a clash of the value systems we considered obsolete almost 30 years ago with the fall of the Berlin Wall. We were convinced that European unification would be linked to a triumphant procession of freedom and our way of life. We were wrong.

Freedom and democracy don't develop on their own. It takes leadership to do this, as the founding fathers, politicians like Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman and Alcide de Gaspari demonstrated back then.

I.

Biographical experiences are important when it comes to political decisions, and this too would be evidenced in the actions of the founding fathers; they had lived through two world wars in the first half of the 20th century and their attitudes were based on the latent threats to peace, the need for reconciliation and the unity of peoples. They were convinced that economic unification should be the start of the path to a union which viewed itself as a community of values. Jacques Delors, President of the EC Commission from 1985-1995 speaks of the soul and spirituality that are essential to the future of Europe. "If, over the coming years, we fail to give Europe a soul, spirituality, a meaning, the game is lost. Believe me and what experience has taught me; Europe is doomed to fail with political skill and economic expertise alone. It will not be possible to achieve the European Union's full potential without a long-term commitment." (Jacques Delors, Europe needs a soul. Quoted from www.comece.eu/europainfos/de/archiv/ausgabe163/article/5938.html)

The speech of Pope John Paul II to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 1988 refers directly to this. It is about the inculturation of Christianity in Europe and the formative power of Christian roots to understand man, who has a unique dignity and fundamental rights.

The Pope recalled Benedict of Nursia, appointed by Pope Paul VI as the patron saint of Europe. Europe's culture was inspired by Christianity, with Saint Benedict, as it were, as the architect of the

Christian West. The extent to which Pope John Paul II sought to recall the cultural foundations of Europe is also evident given that he appointed more patron saints of Europe during his pontificate: Saints Cyril and Methodius, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden and Teresia Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein). Their life and work show the spiritual diversity that has shaped the history of Christianity in Europe. He called on Europeans to invest as much commitment in the search for the soul of Europe as it has for a common market. The particular interest of the church in the evolution of Europe has been clear in its contribution to the cultural identity of the continent. He was speaking as a Pope who had come from the East, and described this part of the shared Europe as the other lung. He had a vision of Europe; it should achieve its full geographic dimension, that would therefore enable it to breathe with “two lungs”. He often referred to political messianism that has often led to a horrible tyranny resulting from the ideologies of a claim to absoluteness that has excluded God. Christianity itself makes the distinction between “things that are God’s” and “things that are Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21). Christianity was an inspirational source of ethics, which was relevant to society and not merely limited to a private matter and if this happens, the future of Europe will be lost. The preservation of creation, an ethic for the co-existence of people, the empowerment of the individual and a culture that leads to faith – this is what Europe should stand for.

Today we know that, one year after this speech, the vision of this Pope would become a reality with the fall of the Wall. He made his own significant contribution by encouraging the Polish trade union movement *Solidarność* to promote a peaceful revolution in Europe. Mikhail Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs that the reunification of Europe would not have been possible without Pope John Paul II. Many Christians in the Central and Eastern European countries were inspired by him to work towards the “miracle of change”. (See: Joachim Jauer, *Urbi et Gorbis*, Christians as forerunners of the turnaround, Freiburg i.Br. et al 2008)

If we ask today what Christians can contribute to political change, then we should remember this peaceful revolution. They had a long-term vision; they prayed for freedom for 10 years; they went out onto the streets with candles; they ensured that the revolution remained peaceful. Their faith, moral courage and perseverance helped fundamentally change the political climate and facilitated the great process of transformation in Europe.

A quarter of a century later, in November 2014, Pope Francis spoke to the European Parliament. He was the first Pope who had not come from Europe, and his speech made it clear he was convinced that Europe was still not achieving its full potential. He felt the continent was old, tired and not creative enough. As he formulated his concepts of a new vivacity and responsibility, he referred to Raphael’s famous frescoes of the School of Athens in the Vatican Museum. He said “Plato and Aristotle are at the centre; the former is pointing his finger up to the heavens, to the world of ideas, so to speak, while the latter extends his hand forwards, to the observer, to the earth, practical reality.” (Francis, European Parliament 2014, 65)

Europe should always remember that the European has always been characterized by “openness to the transcendent” (ibid). If this ability were to be lost, then Europe would lose its soul. Again, the reference to Europe’s soul. This topic has, of course, been discussed in more recent history of the European Union, but this didn’t help in the debate on a reference to God in the European Constitution. He was not included, and Europe was therefore weakened. The outcome of the debate at the time was not an expression of self-confidence, and an important source of the cultural identity of Europeans had been concealed. Germany did in fact vote in favour of the reference to God at the time.

Pope Francis also stressed in his speech that the place of humans was central in Europe's cultural heritage and to acknowledge this meant “to promote one’s talents (68) and to develop a holistic understanding of education. Finally, he lamented the imbalance between “individualistic rights” and

the social context. He described a resulting loneliness of the old, sick, poor, unemployed and victims of circumstance, and those who had come to Europe as refugees. The economic crisis had aggravated loneliness and also deepened people's distrust of institutions. He referred to the "throw-away culture" and "unbridled consumerism" (64) which was leading Europeans to forget their cultural roots. It was a speech that appealed with particular urgency to the human potential that was part of the spirit of Europe and which was in danger of sinking into oblivion. He formulated this as a question of democracy and, four years later, we can see the prophetic power of this speech. Crises, and finally the refugees, for whom Europe is a place of longing, have not led to the consciousness of being a community of values, but have increasingly resulted in a reduction in cohesion and a weakening of democracy. It is true that, when all power is directed towards economic progress, the fear of losing the economic stability that has been achieved obscures the human potential of Europe. This benefits those who seek to replace politics with slogans. A calm and cosmopolitan policy that appeals to the spirit of community is struggling, and it is clear that the current trajectory is unsustainable: neither for the future of the European Union nor for the human potential of the Community.

II.

As I mentioned earlier, biographies are important for political action. The experiences of the founding fathers were critical for their convictions that everything possible should be done to avoid future armed conflicts in Europe, and it was a major driver in the spirit of solidarity for the Community. This perspective appears to have been lost, and peace in Europe has been taken for granted in my and future generations; we are the first generations in Europe who have lived in peace all our lives. This has not applied to countries in the Balkans of course, where peace is still under threat. Even Kant pointed out that peace is "not the natural state". Each generation must strive for a way of peace, and if a persistent diminishing cohesion replaces this perspective, it will jeopardise peace. We know that language creates reality, so the threat to peace starts with the brutalisation of language. This is more than a question of style. Biographies today may be influenced by the security and stability of the days when Europe's economic stability increased, they therefore appeal to a fear of loss. It is also obvious that individualisation has crept into politics. This also threatens the existence of popular parties in Europe.

Anyone today who says we are concerned about the suffering of people in the world, in war zones and those who are fleeing their own country, is told that we in Europe cannot take responsibility for all the weary and burdened. The argument, made with some force and to cause insecurity is that "not all the refugees can come to us." The majority of refugees are not on their way to Europe, but that's irrelevant when it comes to sowing a sense of fear and hatred. If the original motivation of the founding fathers was marked by a desire for lasting peace and the path to a community of values and attitudes, today those who are particularly successful are engendering a fear of loss and constantly complaining about Brussels. The latter is nothing new. Brussels, as the political centre of the European Union, is often cited as the source of many evils. Brexit is an example. It was consistently stated that the burdens of the member states - in concrete terms, the burdens of the United Kingdom - in the Union are greater than the benefits of the Union for the member states. The conviction that one's own country is doing well when the European Union is doing well has been abandoned. We all know the result. The Brexit negotiations show us that the UK government is trying to procure the maximum benefit from, with none of the responsibility for, the Community. Ultimately, it won't succeed, and will lead to a dislocation within that country. Nobody can guess the outcome of these negotiations.

Anyone who knows the history of the European Union better will also know that crises have happened before. Just remember only the speech of the "Eurosclerosis" in the early '80s, when the process of European integration stalled mainly for economic reasons. Even then, there was talk of reducing the UK's contribution to the EC budget (the "UK rebate"). National economies were experiencing a slump,

and the Community budget was stretched to the limit. At that time - immediately after the direct election to the European Parliament in 1979 – people talked of a tired Europe. In many negotiations, the European Community was struggling, above all owing to growing mass unemployment and the reform backlog in many member countries, so the Community is no stranger to problems. Difficult circumstances have so far always led to a boost and to a new dynamism. In the 1980s, it was a comprehensive programme of reforms that reinforced the power of integration.

So, what is the situation today?

In 2016 in Rome, Pope Francis received the international Charlemagne Prize of the city of Aachen, which recognises figures who have made a special contribution to the integration process in Europe. He was honoured because his speeches, e.g. to the European institutions in Strasbourg, conveyed “a message of hope and encouragement” (justification of the Directorate in Aachen). Then, in his acceptance speech in the Apostolic House in Rome, he described the three of Europe’s key capabilities: the capacity for integration, the capacity for dialogue and the capacity to produce a new humanism. He appealed not just to focus on crises, but to the potential Europe had and that makes it such a great source of attraction around the world; the potential that lies in the meeting of cultures in Europe, and has made the continent a place of freedom, diversity and tolerance. This tolerance should not be jeopardised, because it is part of the cultural memory of the Europeans.

Pope Francis recalled that the flight into national isolation is not the answer to the world’s problems. A quarter of a century after the fall of the Wall, new walls and border fences will not protect anyone, but will threaten the stability and weaken what we have achieved so far in terms of our cultural, social and economic prosperity. They make fragile the foundations on which the European Union is built; he understood the “new European humanism” as the force that would prevent exclusion and isolation and focused on integration and inclusion. “The face of Europe does not differ in that it opposes others, but that it bears the traits of different cultures and the beauty that comes from overcoming a lack of cohesion.” (Francis, *My Dream for Europe*, 18). Based on its history, the Pope called Europe a source of humanism.

There are undoubtedly some fateful years ahead for Europe; elections for the European Parliament will take place in May of next year, when the heads of the European institutions will be newly elected, and new core policies will be formulated. Cardinal Walter Kasper responded to the current mood of crisis at the Charlemagne Prize ceremony: “Yet every situation is also a time to make decisions. It can become the “Kairos”, the opportune moment, and lead to good but can also end in disaster; it depends on what we make of it, whether we allow ourselves to be driven by fear or ‘Do not be afraid’”. (Sermon at the festive mass in St. Peter’s Basilica).

III.

What are our motives today when we talk about the future of Europe? What can promote a new perspective?

1. WE MUST OVERCOME THE WIDESPREAD ANXIETY!

It is clear that the refugees, for whom Europe looks like the "Promised Land", have unsettled Europeans. It has sometimes been said that the talk of Europe as a product of peace no longer appeals to a young generation today because they take peace for granted, while the refugees of course remind us how we should never take peace for granted. Their lived experiences show us that violence, terror and no vision of the future for their lives and those of their children are realities in the global world. Europe is acting as if in self-defence; its own insecurity is leading to the political approval of those who promise to protect Europeans from the refugees and their problems. The debate is increasingly highlighting the capacity for successful integration where facts are replaced by emotions. Hence the major task is to change perspective, to overcome one's own fear of losing what has been

achieved in Europe and to regain that self-confidence that will continue the success story of integration.

2. WE NEED A BASIC ATTITUDE OF RESPECT!

This means respect for the dignity of every human being and respect for what each member country brings to the Community. Respect is a prerequisite for dialogue. The Community has grown with the reunification of Europe, which means a multiplication of different interests. It must not become an "alliance of egotists" (Adolf Muschg). The longing of people for freedom and respect for people has torn down walls; everyone has benefited and all have contributed to it. Now everyone needs the power to work on a shared vision of the future, and this includes respect for those seeking protection and a future in Europe. They too will do their part. They will remind us how much democracy, freedom and cohesion in the Community has made Europe strong. They can contribute to that strength if we allow them to; but if we refuse, if we do not rely on Europe's human potential, Europe will lose its strength and self-confidence. All the more so because respect for man and the special position of man are part of Europe's cultural memory, and this loss of memory would weigh heavily.

3. WE MUST REDISCOVER THE POWER OF DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE!

Europe is a continent of diversity, not uniformity. Its appeal and charisma include the diversity of languages, characteristics and cultural manifestations. Or, as Adolf Muschg said: "The plurality of truths must become a strong, humble, but faithful belief in Europe. Lessing's wisdom is fitting here, who, when God offered him truth in his right hand or the search for truth in the left, preferred the left hand, because the whole truth is for God alone." (...) This attitude safeguards against new ideologies, and anyone who has attended meetings of the European Council of Ministers knows how diverse the opinions, positions and representations of truth are. The debates that are then conducted in every generation can then find a European way. This is not dictated by this or that person, but is the result of long debates, it must be feasible for all and we must accept that things may move at different speeds.

4. EUROPE NEEDS MORE INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY AND A WILLINGNESS TO INNOVATE!

What do I mean by this? One of Europe's weaknesses is that across all countries, 25% of young adults aged up to 25 are unemployed. which is all the more problematic as Europe is regarded internationally as an aging continent. Although the younger generation today is better educated than any previous generation, education and employment systems exist in very few countries. This young generation is also, as never before, a European generation. It is, as it were, the Erasmus generation; their CVs are shaped by international experiences. Europe has become a matter of course for this generation - this applies to open borders as well as to the common currency and the many university and educational partnerships that extend beyond them. The European Higher Education Area has also contributed to this.

This generation must be won for Europe, and this will be extremely difficult if, despite their best education and training, they receive no indication that they are needed. We will only be able to improve the future prospects of the younger generation if we are committed to innovation. Europe must become more intellectually curious, and become a continent of start-ups and the associated professional autonomy. Europe has too little ambition to be the international leader in innovation. The promotion of talents and creativity is one of the noble tasks of modern societies, which also includes the compatibility of education and employment systems. Good education must lead to good future prospects, and young people must feel that their talents, ideas and creativity are in demand.

Education and science belong to the diplomacy of trust. European solidarity with young people and between the member countries is important here. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the heads of state and government of the European Union in Berlin declared: "Europe's wealth lies in the knowledge and expertise of its people; this is the key to growth,

employment and social cohesion.” We should always remember this quasi-European idea: to focus on people and their skills to promote prospects for progress.

5. EUROPE NEEDS THE WILL OF THE EU IN CIVIL SOCIETIES

The “pulse of Europe” is a faint sign of hope that something is happening in civil society in Europe. People are coming out, discussing Europe and demonstrating a passion for Europe. Why is this important? Because politics of course looks very closely at what’s happening in society, and what message this is sending to the political class. I realise that Christians have different views on ethical issues, but over the past two years I have often wondered what would happen if Christians in Europe were to share a strong common voice with the refugees. It is possible, as the reunification of Europe has shown, to move mountains. This will be neither quick nor easy; it requires perseverance, courage and persuasiveness, and the reality is very different at present, as Christians and also churches represent very different and diametrically opposing positions. The fear of Islam is a major factor here, and it is also becoming apparent how weak the cohesive power of the churches in Europe has become; they are failing to engage in European political discourse, although “Christian roots” are frequently discussed. This is demonstrated particularly in demarcation and exclusion, but not as a foundation for a European agenda focused on Christians.

If the reference to the “Christian West” becomes a weapon against outsiders, it will lose all its power and will become a defensive attitude, in which case, we can also stop searching for the soul of Europe and spirituality, which Jacques Delors said is vital to the survival of the European Union. The soul of Europe has been the subject of much discussion; but this reluctance to speak about Christianity in Europe with a positive connotation has even surfaced in the debate about a reference to God in the European Constitution.

The underestimation of the meaning of religion is also apparent in another context; the foreign ministries of Europe are still calling for value-based policies that exclude religion, and those who hold this opinion are failing to understand what is happening in many other regions of the world. But anyone who believes this are essentially abandoning Christianity to those who are deriving a clear and aggressive defensive attitude from it. We have to recognise that Christians do not identify with this in European civil societies, but we are currently very far from this position.

6. EUROPE NEEDS THE CLEAR WILL TO ADHERE TO EUROPEAN CONVICTIONS

A new perspective is not a return to the past, and we can’t merely recall a reality of days gone by. European nostalgia may be inappropriate, but we cannot expect a renewed political consensus to be achieved in Europe overnight. If anything, the conflicts have become even more harsh, particularly in view of the imminent election campaigns, and those who are working towards sustainable European convictions also need this new perspective, regardless of the candidates who will soon be up for election. We need to have more, rather than less, in common when it comes to the vital issues, where Europe must be able to conduct a global dialogue. But where do we stand today? Maybe soul and spirituality can be conveyed, promoted and engaged through our convictions. This should be at the heart of the discussions in the civil societies of Europe, in the communities, associations and institutions. I believe this is the way to unleash great human potential, and we could achieve what Plato and Aristotle are offering us in Raphael’s work: to be people who are open to transcendence and responsible to the world.

Timothy Radcliffe said in an interview that democracy is central to Dominican spirituality. In an article in the Dominican annual journal he wrote: “Unfortunately, God does not always speak clearly through my brother. Sometimes what he says is simply wrong! Nevertheless, the heart of our democracy is the conviction that even if what he says is mistaken and foolish, there is a grain of truth in his statement that is waiting to be revealed.” (248) This attitude could be a path to open up a new vision for Europe.

Christian orders in Europe, including the Dominican Order, could participate as a creative minority for a new perspective in Europe. They could strive to overcome anxiety and promote an attitude of respect for humans, to discover the power of diversity and tolerance, to encourage more intellectual curiosity and innovation both for the European Union and for the shared European principles. A willingness to discover a “grain of truth”, even where misconceptions threaten to divide the Union, could set standards for new strength for integration in Europe.

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