



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

REBUILDING COMMUNITY IN EUROPE

COMECE Bishops' Statement in view of the 2019 European Elections

From **23-26 May 2019** all EU citizens across the European continent will be responsible for electing **the new members of the European Parliament**. The electoral results will condition the political decisions impacting on our day to day lives during the next 5 years.

The **Catholic Church has been part of the European construction for over 2 millennia, from its grassroots to the day**, contributing through its Social Doctrine.

Ten years ago, the entry into force of the **Treaty of Lisbon** opened an array of new possibilities. Facing many uncertainties, the current mood seems less optimistic. The 2019 European elections come at the right moment to make the political choices that will foster a renewed **brotherhood amongst people, relaunching the European project**.

In this context, **the COMECE Bishops call upon all believers and all people of good will to vote**. We invite our fellow Europeans not to fall into the temptation of inward looking but to exercise their rights towards the **construction of Europe**. By making their own political opinion heard, the people have the capacity to steer the Union in the direction they want to go.

The **EU is not perfect** and probably needs a new narrative of **hope**, involving its citizens in **projects** perceived as more inclusive and better serving the **common good**. **Each opinion counts** when choosing the persons who will hereto represent our political opinions. **Elections are only the first step** of a political engagement and calls for citizens to democratically monitor and accompany the political process.

In a spirit of responsibility, citizens and the institutions that serve them must work together for a **common destiny, going beyond divisions, disinformation and political instrumentalisation**.

To be successful, **the electoral debate** should **focus on EU policies**, as well as on the **ability of candidates** to elaborate and apply them. **Integrity, competence, leadership and commitment to common good** are necessary qualities for those individuals looking to fulfil a mandate at the EU level. The **electoral debate** is the right time to **proclaim and bring forth different visions, beyond sterile confrontations**.

It is also the right opportunity for **believers to question candidates on their personal engagement** during their mandate to protect **human dignity** for all, promote options reflecting **a new Christian Humanism** and foster **policies that serve and are shaped by fundamental rights**.

What does it mean to be Europeans? Europe is sometimes perceived as distant and self-absorbed. As European citizens, we have to take a step and assume responsibility in giving concrete meaning to "**unity in diversity**". Unity in diversity implies **common rules, that account for** legitimate protection and promotion of **freedoms and liberties** through democratic practices that **exemplify accountability, transparency** and a just application of the **Rule of Law**. European public authorities should **not be seen as imposing unilateral decisions** from outside, but rather as favouring the personal and collective engagement of all citizens in a true, creative and respectful dialogue.

To be able to address the challenges it has to face, the EU needs to rediscover its **common identity** and to strengthen its **solidarity** to renovate the **social links that exist** in and amongst countries and peoples. We need an EU that is **protective of families, of the most vulnerable, of cultures**. Respect for the principle of **subsidiarity** should be a key pillar of a **Union in which all can feel at home and as equal craftsmen, we dare say "drivers", of the project**. This is also about **cherishing and preserving the achievements of the EU** and being ambitious enough to **find new ones**.

Dialogue with Churches and religious communities should be further **reinforced** on the basis of Article 17 TFEU, with creativity, commitment and respect on the part of the EU institutions.

The EU is facing important challenges. Digitalisation is not just a crisis, but also a mutation. Taking back control of our lives in the face of digitalisation implies decisions to make **economy and finance better serve the people, especially the most vulnerable. Digitalisation** has an impact on **all and everything we know** (the future of work, protection of personal data, the multiple uses of artificial intelligence). For COMECE it is fundamental to preserve the **centrality of the human person** and an approach based on **solid ethical frameworks**.

Family-friendly rules and practices should be developed at the EU level, accompanying the integral human development of **persons, families and communities**. The issue of **demography has to regain centre stage**. The subject concerns **natality as well as ageing**. The lack of hope and perspectives is leading a number of countries to witness a sharp decrease of their population. **Young Europeans** need to feel reassured **to be in a condition to form a family and be given back hope in their country of origin** through common, mutually beneficial projects.

The well-being of the human family is linked with a Union that fosters a **social market economy**. **Policies to reduce poverty** should be based on the idea that what works for the less fortunate works for all.

A renewed effort to find effective and shared solutions concerning migration, asylum and integration is expected. **Integration** is a matter not only for people entering the EU, but also for EU citizens moving to a country other than their own. This leads to the question: how to better welcome each other in Europe? Furthermore, migration and asylum are **not an independent issue**, being linked with solidarity, a human-centred perspective, effective economic and demographic policies.

Voting at these Elections also means **taking responsibility for the unique role of Europe at the global level**. **Common good is bigger than Europe**. For instance, care for the **environment** and **sustainable development** cannot be limited to the EU borders and electoral results will impact the decisions affecting the entirety of mankind. A strong Union on the international stage is also necessary for the promotion and protection of **human rights** in all domains and for a solid contribution of **the EU as a multi-lateral actor to peace and economic justice**. Europe has to **remain competitive while not renouncing to its principles and standards**.

At the **"(Re)thinking Europe" Dialogue, in October 2017, Pope Francis** recalled that *"The European Union will remain faithful to its commitment to peace only to the extent that it does not lose hope and can renew itself in order to respond to the needs and expectations of its citizens"*.

Voting might only be a first step, but a most necessary one. With Pope Francis' inspiration in mind, we **call on all citizens**, young and old, to **vote and engage** during the run up and at the **European Elections**: this is the best way to make of Europe what they deem right and just. Voting is not only a right and a duty, but **an opportunity to concretely shape European construction!**