

Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Youssef Soueif
Representing the COMECE in the CEC Peace Conference

Peace Forum:

“Europe’s Peace Vocation and the Role of Security and Peace”

10-12 September 2019

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to participate in the CEC Peace Conference, representing the Commission of the Catholic Bishops of the European Union (COMECE), conveying the greetings of its President, Archbishop of Luxembourg Jean Claude Hollerich, who was called by Pope Francis few days ago to be a member of the College of Cardinals. I am glad to take part in the Peace Forum: “Europe’s Peace Vocation and the Role of Security and Peace”.

I congratulate the CEC for opening this platform and reviving the spiritual, political and conscientious attitude after 100 years of the Peace Treaty of Versailles - Paris, which ceased the First World War but then the world entered a Second World War, after which the project of the European Union started to take place; I’m wondering if we haven't entered yet into a third world war as Pope Francis warns. This war is executed by small wars in different parts of the world, it has another mechanism and type. The interest of the great powers are more evident through economic disasters, trade of arms and social collapses, which have dangerous consequences on the innocent people, poor communities and unarmed individuals who always pay the highest price.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF PEACE

There is a spiritual attitude/**approach** to be taken into consideration when we talk about peace. Peace for us is a Person, who is Jesus Christ himself, the Incarnated Word of God, the King of Peace who by His blood on the Cross reconciled mankind and brought us back our dignity by His death and resurrection, as the first word announced by Jesus after his resurrection was: "Peace be with you, my peace I give you." (.....). So, peace starts through our personal encounter with Christ and it is incarnated in the daily life through our commitments for building peace as individuals, communities and nations.

We, Churches but as a One Church ask ourselves about the quality of this relationship with the Lord, the Source of Peace. We raise the question as Church in Europe and we acknowledge with humbleness and courage that “yes”, we promoted peace in our continent, but also we should repent and purify our memories and hearts when we were not building peace among us, inside the Church and in the civil society. It is the Momentum of the Church of Europe to have

a clear vision, to take initiatives to let the peace reign in the hearts and minds of all. Our Churches are called through the dynamic of the diaconia to witness the Gospel. We are there to serve and not to be served, we are there to serve our societies, to accompany our communities, to take care of every human being the farthest before the nearest without distinguishing between “us and them”. We are there to share responsibility inside the Church but also in the civil and political societies. Europe is for all of us and we all form the European family. This is the beauty of Europe, diverse but one, the diversity and the unity is the reflection of the mystical body of Christ where we are called to be peacemakers, "Blessed are those who seek peace, for they are called sons of God" (Matthew 5: 9).

PAIN OF EUROPE

Having paid dearly for the two world wars, Europe has irrevocably chosen to be the “Continent of Peace”. Peace is at the heart of its call, toward itself and to the entire World. Our Continent has suffered the loss of millions of victims. We know by first-hand what does it mean destructions, displaced, refugees and migrants. They are terminologies that existed and still exist in our vocabulary, we should not forget them. Our cities and villages have been destroyed several times, so Europe lived the pain and it is convinced today that conflict can be resolved only through true and just dialogue to regain peace.

Europe has suffered and lost and has been destroyed several times and it is convinced that conflicts can be resolved only

THE VOCATION OF EUROPE

European history is extremely rich, where one can acknowledge its brilliant white pages that have influenced the world heritage starting from the Christian spirituality, the culture of the Gospel, to the social and artistic creativity and the technological development. But we should also admit our mistakes of Europe, wars, the broken treaties of peace, the materialism, the extreme laicism that deny the presence of God not only at the individual level but as well in the public areas. We must be modest and courageous to learn the lessons in the integrated vision of the human being who is called to grow in a harmonious manner between body, soul and spirit. The vocation of Europe is to guarantee this harmony which leads to a real and sustainable peace. I would say, peace is not only a spiritual and human value, it is indeed a virtue that guides Europe and its civil, spiritual and official institutions, to build peace, to replace conflicts and crisis by the logic of peace.

Our vocation is a “Vocation of Peace”.

We, Bishops of the COMECE called for the development of an “authentic European Peace policy” based on 3 pillars that the EU Global Strategy has taken up several reflections and recommendations: 1) pre-emptive peace-building 2) promoting peace through justice 3) promoting peace through security

1) “Pre-emptive peacebuilding“ is part of the EU Global Strategy’s priority “Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crisis“, but the EU still needs to step up its action in early conflict prevention, including preventive diplomacy, crisis anticipation, early warning and early action; also post-conflict reconstruction and processes of reconciliation are important elements in preventing future crisis.

2) For the Catholic Church, “peace is an enterprise of justice”; the European Union should thus base its External Action on an integral concept of security, which considers (a) human, (b) socio-economic and (c) ecological justice as essential drivers of peace.

a) In the area of human justice, the EU should be an active promoter of Human Rights through a coherent use of all its internal and external policy instruments; the fundamental human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion has a particular importance in today’s world, and the EU can play a more active global role in promoting Freedom of Religion.

b) The fostering of “Resilience“ which is defined as priority of EU’s External Action in the Global Strategy can be instrumental in changing EU’s approach to third countries and their citizens – not to decrease its commitment, but to change from an “external interventionist“ and mere “financial donor“ to an authentic and equal partner in investing in capacities enabling sustainable development of countries and supporting skills empowering people in their integral development (cf. COMECE Reflection paper on “Fostering resilience for sustainable peace“, link: <http://bit.ly/2j8qVZZ>).

The notion of an authentic, fair and mutually beneficial partnership based on inclusive dialogue and fair economic and political relations, is particularly relevant in the context of the EU-Africa partnership as well as the on-going negotiations on a future framework of cooperation between the EU and the group of 79 African, Pacific and Caribbean countries (“ACP“, “post-Cotonou“ framework, more info: <http://bit.ly/2mG5GUF>)

c) Also with regard to ecological justice, the EU should play a leading role in global efforts to put the Paris Climate Accord into practice, but also in helping people in affected regions, particularly in poor countries, to adequately respond to natural disasters and mitigate their consequences. The questions of energy security and energy efficiency will also need to be addressed in this respect (Cf. COMECE Reflection paper in view of the Paris Climate Conference COP 21 in 2015)

3) In the last three years, the European Union has made a number of steps to strengthen the cooperation between Member States in the area of security and defence (such as the establishment of “Headquarters” for civil training and advisory missions, the launch of the European Defence Fund to foster defence-related research and capability-development as well as the launch of a “Permanent Structured Cooperation” on security and defence between willing and capable Member States, more info: <http://bit.ly/2gNYtx4>) with the objective to make European defence spending more efficient and enhance the operability and articulation of civil-military efforts in full complementarity and coordination with other security actors (such as United Nations, OSCE, NATO)

CONCEPT OF SECURITY

The value of Europe exists in its vocation: promoting Peace. In front of this value, many questions are being asked today about actions that go against this strategic choice.

What does security mean today for Europe?

Are security and stability organically linked to manufacturing arms?

Are arms limited only to the defence strategy? Or do they become an economic source in the bazaar of solid industry and the black trade?

The Catholic Church is clear in this matter. Here I recall Pope Francis' statement in the meeting of the COMECE in the Vatican (2017) around the subject "Rethinking Europe": "It is an absurd contradiction to speak of peace, to negotiate peace, and at the same time, promote or permit the arms trade. Is this war or that war really a war to solve problems or is it a commercial war for selling weapons in illegal trade and so that the merchants of death get rich? Let us put an end to this situation. Let us pray all together that national leaders may firmly commit themselves to ending the arms trade which victimizes so many innocent people."

In our most recent Reflection Paper entitled "Technology at the Service of Peace", we at the **COMECE** stressed that EU' financial support for the development of innovative military technologies (such as drones, autonomous weapons, etc.) should be guided and assessed by the criteria of human security, and fully comply with legal and ethical standards (especially in full respect for Human Rights and ensuring effective human control over the use of military technologies). In this regard, COMECE suggests the elaboration of a common EU ethical and anthropological reference framework for the assessment of such military technologies.

So the security we are looking for is: Intellectual and cultural security, economic and social security, food and employment security. This requires a clear strategic choice: peace not war, justice not corruption, social integration not ghettos of all kinds: Ethnic, religious, intellectual and geographic. What we are noticing and observing since the Treaty of Peace in Versailles, and the creation of the European Union is that there is a serious tendency to close the boundaries, to rebuild again material and psychological walls, to go back to a certain nationalism which is very worrying in our European continent. We are putting in danger the values of Europe, the sacrifices of 100 years made by heroes and visionaries to open borders and bring people together, to live in freedom, peace diversity and unity.

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

The security policy is not limited to armament; it extends to many types which are contributing not to the consolidation of peace in Europe only, but also in the neighbouring countries, in particular the Middle East, which is still affected by the ongoing wars. Syria, Iraq and the Palestino-Israeli conflict, Lebanon and Jordan are still an open space of crisis creating serious consequences, among which is the human situation of millions of displaced and refugees. Turkey is linked to many open issues: the refugees, the migration to Europe, the Cyprus

problem, and other political, cultural and ethnic topics within the country. How about the Yemen situation, the Iranian issue and its regional and international complexities? The main exit to establish peace in the Region is to educate, strengthen and promote the value of **equal citizenship**. Pope Francis repeatedly is speaking about the instability that for years has marked the Middle East in which “especially the Christian communities that have dwelt in those lands from apostolic times, and down the centuries have contributed to their growth and development. It is extremely important that Christians have a place in the future of the region,” and so he encourages “all those who have sought refuge in other places to do everything possible to return to their homes and in any event to maintain and strengthen their ties to their communities of origin.” At the same time, he expresses “hope that political authorities will not fail to ensure their security and all else needed for them to continue to dwell in the countries of which they are full citizens, and to contribute to their growth.” Sadly the Pope continues: “in these years Syria and more generally the whole Middle East have become a battleground for many conflicting interests. In addition to those of a chiefly political and military nature, we should not overlook attempts to foment hostility between Muslims and Christians. Even though “over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arise between Christians and Muslims”, in different areas of the Middle East they have long lived together in peace.

We mention here the two big fraternal encounters among cultures and religions as a sign of peace and hope of which the encounter between Pope Francis and the king of Marocco and the United Arab Emirates encounter Shaikh of Al Azhar in order to strengthen peace and advance interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims in this year that marks the eight-hundredth anniversary of the historic meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil.

Within this Middle East Region, which is the moving sands, how can we not mention the conflict within the Muslim family, Sunnis and Shiites, and its religious, economic and political motivations.

Europe has an essential role in promoting peace and enhancing security both inside and outside the continent, it must play its role fully, it must assume its responsibility, because of the Geography, the history and the European culture which is based on openness, dialogue, freedom and peace.

Weapons and armaments lead to wars and the search for security outside this equation leads to the development of the human being in a healthy and integrated way for a just and stable peace.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Based on the human dignity, Europe is welcoming many refugees and migrants, phenomenon that the continent knew and that is still alive in its socio – political experience. The migratory phenomenon is so close to the heart of Pope Francis and of every true disciple of Jesus Christ.

When we welcome them, we are welcoming Christ himself, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mathew 25:35), when we care for them we witness the Gospel of the Good Samaritan; and the Gospel is not a book of history from the past, He is the Living Word of the Risen Lord who He is leading the boat to the port of security and peace. Pope Francis is talking about an “inclusive milieu”: “Leaders together share responsibility for promoting a Europe that is an inclusive community, free of one fundamental misunderstanding: namely that inclusion does not mean downplaying differences. On the contrary, a community is truly inclusive when differences are valued and viewed as a shared source of enrichment. Seen in this way, migrants are more a resource than a burden. ... Especially when faced with the tragedy of displaced persons and refugees, we must not forget that we are dealing with persons, who cannot be welcomed or rejected at our own pleasure, or in accordance with political, economic or even religious ideas.”

"... We cannot regard the phenomenon of migration as an indiscriminate and unregulated process, but neither can we erect walls of indifference and fear. For their part, migrants must not neglect their own grave responsibility to learn, respect and assimilate the culture and traditions of the nations that welcome them." (Rethinking Europe, 2017)

POPULISM

This European project today is facing serious challenges mainly the movement of populism. This phenomenon is moved by a strategic psychological and political thinking: the fear of the other – xenophobia, in front of the migrants’ arrival to the continent, these persons belong to different cultures and religions and they live now on the soil of Europe. The Populism is a reaction to the project of Europe which has been considered a failure by the populists and the integralists, it’s also considered as a reaction to the presence of hundreds of thousands of migrants in the continent. The populism is creating a new political sphere through individuals, groups, MPs, and government. It will destroy the European project and the European fundamental values based on freedom, openness, coexistence and peace.

Pope Francis is worrying about this phenomenon: “Favouring dialogue, in any form whatsoever, is a fundamental responsibility of politics. Sadly, all, too often, we see how politics is becoming instead a forum for clashes between opposing forces. The voice of dialogue is replaced by shouted claims and demands. One often has the feeling that the primary goal is no longer the common good, and this perception is shared by more and more citizens. Extremist and populist groups are finding fertile ground in many countries; they make protest the heart of their political message, without offering the alternative of a constructive political project. Dialogue is replaced either by a futile antagonism that can even threaten civil

coexistence, or by the domination of a single political power that constrains and obstructs a true experience of democracy. In the one, bridges are burned; in the other, walls are erected. And Europe is experiencing both.

Christians are called to promote political dialogue, especially where it is threatened and where conflict seems to prevail. ... This demands a suitable formation, because politics is not the “art of improvising”. Instead, it is a noble expression of self-sacrifice and personal dedication for the benefit of the community. To be a leader demands thoughtfulness, training and experience.” (Rethinking Europe, 2017)

A true leader is the one who destroys walls to build peace.

EUROPE: CONTINENT OF PEACE

The Church’s presence and mission is neither to observe events, nor to analyse phenomena and strategies; the Church is called to read prophetically the signs of time-kairos. Her worry is the dignity of every human being, so our call and our voice in the wilderness as John the Baptist, is: “Let us be peacemakers”.

The Church in Europe never gives up and abandons her role and mission, she is aware of the presence of Christ in this continent. In Europe since the beginning of the fourth Century with the Edit of Milan (312), freedom of religions, cultures and expressions were guaranteed.

The Church seeks Europe as an integral human reality: body, soul and spirit together. It is not only a body, but also a soul and a spirit. This unity, integrity and harmony are fundamental for the existence and the mission of this continent.

Europe cannot be developed only by sophisticated technologies and high skills strategies. Europe is a living space of human beings who want to meet each other, to welcome all, to share the vision and to enjoy life in its social, cultural, moral and eschatological dimensions. Europe is called to declare peace, to build peace and to spread peace.

This is what we name in the Divine Liturgy: the “Sacrifice of Peace”.

It is only through modesty/humility and openness to God and to His creation - the “Common Home” that women and men could witness the European project which is a harmonic symphony chanting the hymn of Peace.