



CCEE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

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Address of

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Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union

Your Eminences, Excellencies and dear friends of the CCEE

You can imagine how moving it is for me to address you on this 50th anniversary of the CCEE, thinking of my 13 years of service as Secretary General. I am very grateful to the Presidencies that have guided me, to those working in St Gallen and to you all. In particular I wish to entrust the Church in Europe to the prayers of my two presidents who have already returned to the home of the Father, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk and Bishop Amedée Grab as well as my predecessor in Brussels, the Apostolic Nunzio Monsignor Alain Lebeauvin. I am very sorry not to be present there with you in person but be certain that I will pray for your important assembly.

I have returned to our Europe after more than seven years of service as Nunzio in Venezuela and am trying to discover what characteristics our continent now has and what its responsibilities are. Allow me to share two observations with you.

1. Those seven years in Venezuela have accentuated in my mind questions concerning Europe's global geopolitical role. On September 15th, in the speech made on the 2021 state of the Union by the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, I noticed three statements that will probably affect the future of our continent: 1. "Europe can – and clearly should – be able and willing to do more on its own". A reference made to Nato, but probably also to the United States; 2. "And, let's call it what it is: this is a hybrid attack to destabilise Europe". It appears to me that the critical target is above all Russia, but together we must remember that for the defence of certain values, Russia is also a partner, especially due to its belonging to Orthodox Christianity and one also must not exclude definitively the future possibility of a Union between Europe and Russia! 3. "But what we need is the European Defence union". Speaking of defence, I would have expected an explicit reference to Europe's responsibility, not

only to defend itself, but also to defend its values, but to promote peace in the world faced with the tragic and excessively numerous “proxy wars” wounding the people of this planet. I am convinced that Europe could play a fundamental and unique role as a peace builder. At all levels Europe has the power needed to provide mediation services between small and large powers to find the path to reconciliation when violence explodes. Think for example of Venezuela. It is evident that there is a global geopolitical match taking place in the country, especially concerning its wealth, with politically opposing fronts. Who might have the power to summon to a negotiating table nation such as Russia and the United States in order to address the good of the people of Venezuela, which is the suffering subject, regardless of political differences? Could it not be the European Union? Should not the greater autonomy the European Union is trying to conquer be aimed at this task? Would this not be the best defence strategy even when faced with destabilising attempts? Should Europe aim to become peacekeeping force in the world, it would recover the vocation inscribed in its roots and that soul and ideal mentioned by the venerable Robert Schuman. Together it would give rise to interest especially in that world of the young that everyone is now trying to attract to the union’s cause.

2. When I started my service as secretary of the CCEE, in 1995, it was clear that Europe and the Church of the times was faced with basic tension between the European West and East following many years during which they had been separated by the Iron Curtain. It seemed to me then that at least at an ecclesial level, this tension had progressively lessened. Returning to Europe I am discovering that the union between the East and the West is still a problem and a goal. This has been confirmed to me in many talks during the recent Eucharistic Congress held in Budapest I had the joy of attending. Political tension was spreading and there is an impression that economic union is not a reality and at a cultural and moral level there are some from the East who spoke of attempts to colonise. Should this statement be founded, it would lead to questions concerning the role of the Church in contributing to unity on our continent. It seems to me that the Church has the heavy responsibility of acting as an area of fraternity that stands above cultural and political tensions. Sadly, history teaches us that nationalistic, ethnic, tribal and ideological tensions have almost always been stronger and prevailed over the communion that characterises the Gospel and the Church. World wars have been tragic examples of this, as has the violence that exploded in the Balkans. Europe could write new pages for history.

May the Light of the Holy Spirit guide your work