



## III EUROPEAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DAYS BRATISLAVA, 17-20 March 2022

**H.Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich**  
**Archbishop of Luxembourg, COMECE President**

Your Eminence, Your Excellences,  
Dear delegates of the Bishops' Conferences,  
Dear guests,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you today to the **third edition** of the European Catholic Social Days! Many thanks for joining us from all the countries across Europe, both online, and here with us in Bratislava.

### *{Why this event?}*

Twelve years after the first European Catholic Social Days' Congress in Gdansk (2009) and seven years following our last joint congress in Madrid (2014), we recognize again the need to bring together the voice of the Catholic Social Teaching and Gospel into practice to answer to some of the greatest social challenges of our time.

Looking at "Europe beyond the pandemic" and towards "a new beginning", these days will be the occasion to reflect on the importance of solidarity and social justice in a Europe in transition.

Of course, the 3rd European Catholic Social Days are taking place today in a completely different context. And while we are talking about solidarity, I wish to reiterate once again our fraternal closeness and solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, as well as with those fleeing the horrors of war, while thanking the Church and many volunteers in Ukraine, Slovakia and other neighbouring countries for their humanitarian efforts and pastoral care.

As Pope Francis already expressed in *Fratelli Tutti*, "the first victim of every war is the human family's innate vocation to fraternity"<sup>1</sup>. This is why, during this third edition of the Social Days, I invite you to rediscover together our vocation to fraternity, and to reflect and debate on the way forward towards a just recovery in Europe, leaving no one behind. Through this reflection, we will aim to contribute to the rebuilding process from a Christian perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fratelli Tutti*, 26, *ibid Message for the 2020 World Day of Peace* (8 December 2019), 1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 December 2019, p. 8.

## *{Key topics of the Social Days}*

As you can see on the programme, three main transitions shall be particularly explored during our Social Days:

First, the demographic transition and family life.

Second, the technological and digital transition,

Third, the ecological transition

Let me go briefly through the topics.

### *[1 - Demographic transition and Family life]*

- One of Pope Francis' Dreams for Europe is "**a Europe that is a family and a community**"<sup>2</sup>.
- Answering to Pope Francis' call to **rediscover the sense of community**, the first community being the family, the first session of the Social Days will approach the issue of the **population decline, the growing rural-urban divide in Europe, and the importance of family as the nucleus cell of society**.
- Families provide stability and a nurturing environment to the spouses and their children. When the importance of the family is lost and its institutional protection decreases, the consequences can be felt far and wide.
- In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis calls on us to resist against individualism and a "throwaway world":  
*"A decline in the birthrate, which leads to the aging of the population, together with the relegation of the elderly to a sad and lonely existence, is a subtle way of stating that it is all about us, that our individual concerns are the only thing that matters. In this way, what is thrown away are not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves."*<sup>3</sup>
- Family is the future of Europe and must be supported by adequate social policies to cope with the real '**demographic winter**'.
- **Acting as a community** means developing a **spirit of fraternity and solidarity**, against individualism and conflicts, in order to face together the challenges that Europe faces.
- **This afternoon**, we will have the occasion to reflect on the **growing demographic change** in our society and how the Church, the EU and all its citizens can contribute to the **protection and promotion of families**, the building of a **culture of life**, of **economic fairness** and the promotion of the **Catholic Social teaching**.

### *[2 - Technological and Digital transition]*

- Tomorrow, we will discuss the technological and digital transition.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transition. **Teleworking**, enabled by technology, has allowed many workers to maintain their work. At the same time, it strengthened an '**always-on**' culture, thus blurring the boundaries between work and non-

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<sup>2</sup> [Letter](#) of His Holiness Pope Francis on Europe, *on the 40th anniversary of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the European Union, and the 50th anniversary of the presence of the Holy See as Permanent Observer at the Council of Europe*.

<sup>3</sup> *Fratelli Tutti*, 19. Ibid Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (13 January 2014): AAS 106 (2014), 83-84.

work activities. In addition, there was a substantial increase of **platform work** during the pandemic.

- All these developments are shaping the **future of work**, affecting in particular work content, work organisation, job quality, working conditions and work-life balance.
- In the past years, the **EU** has been very active to **accompany the digital transition**, and the **digital transition** is one of the key pillars of the EU recovery plan.
- Although the digitalisation phenomenon has long started, the current transition is characterised by the accelerated development of **advanced technologies**. However, the benefits of digital technologies are not without **risks and costs**. In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis insisted that *"the goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity"*.
- On the contrary, investments in *"new technological and scientific knowledge must be placed at the service of mankind's primary needs, gradually increasing humanity's common patrimony"*<sup>4</sup>.
- This major transformation of society calls for a thorough reflection, from the Church and at all levels of society, on how Europe can best respond to the risks and challenges. This is why, in our **second main session tomorrow morning**, we will reflect on the major transformation of society brought by the digital and technological transition, judging on its ethical and anthropological implications, and discussing how digitalisation may help everybody in the pursuit of a dignified life.
- Together, we will engage in a reflection on **how the Church, the EU and all citizens can take responsibilities and concrete steps** to best be part of and accompany the technological and digital transition.

### [3 - Ecological transition]

- Solidarity will be necessary to tackle one of the greatest challenges of our time, climate change. Pope Francis drew the world's attention to the "integral" dimension of this crisis in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*: *"We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental."*<sup>5</sup>
- Pope Francis together with other faith leaders also urged for an "ecological conversion". Especially in this Lenten season, we need to **experience the conversion**, the **change of heart**, to which the Pope invites us. For, in the words of the Pope, *"all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents."* (FT #14)
- The ecological transition is also a key pillar of the **EU recovery plan**, and the **European Green Deal** is at its heart, in order to become the world's first carbon neutral continent by 2050. To deliver on this ambition, the European Commission has adopted a climate package in July 2021, the so called **"Fit for 55" Package**, in reference to the EU's objective of reducing its carbon emissions of at least 55% by 2030.
- After the **COP26 in Glasgow**, the third session of the Social Days and in particular the third session **tomorrow afternoon** will be the occasion to debate on the urgent need for an ecological conversion and the challenge to shape the transition to the benefit of everybody, as one **human family**, as indicated in *Laudato Si'*<sup>6</sup>. I invite you to reflect in a synodal way on responsibilities and concrete steps that can be taken as part of the ecological transition at the policy level, by the Church as well as by each citizen.

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<sup>4</sup> [Compendium](#) of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 179.

<sup>5</sup> Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home, 139.

<sup>6</sup> Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 13.

### *{Closing}*

Now, let me wish you a good start into the Third European Catholic Social Days, and let's join Pope Francis' prayers by turning our exchanges to the Lord, *"Father of our human family", to "create healthier societies and a more dignified world"*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> *Fratelli Tutti*, Prayer to the Creator.