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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the 7th Rome MED Dialogues Conference

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the 7th Rome MED Dialogues Conference, taking place in Rome from 2 to 4 December 2021:

Message of the Holy Father

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I send cordial greetings to those taking part in the VII Conference “Rome MED Dialogues”, sponsored annually by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and by the Institute for International Political Studies, in order to rethink the traditional approach to the Mediterranean region and to find new and shared responses to the important challenges it poses.

Although the great kingdoms and empires of the Mediterranean region are long gone, the *mare nostrum* continues to be of central geopolitical importance in the present century. The Mediterranean is itself a frontier, a place of encounter, for the three continents bathed by its waters, which thus touch one another and are called to peaceful coexistence.

This interconnection shows us, and not merely symbolically, that our entire planet is a great common home, and that the destiny of any one country is not independent of that of others. At the same time, the concept of “independence” is itself undergoing a dangerous shift in meaning. Whereas in the past, it meant the legitimate claim of autonomy with respect to interference and occupation by foreign states, it is now coming to mean “indifference” and “disinterest” with regard to the fate of other peoples. Politics and diplomacy need to take this seriously and to do everything possible to prevent the process of globalization from degenerating into a globalization of indifference.

A commitment of this sort is all the more urgently needed today, since it is becoming ever more evident – from climate change to the pandemic – that not only states but entire continents cannot continue to ignore one

another.

If this is true in general, it is even more so in the case of the Mediterranean region. The immense resources and possibilities of this sea require a new approach, not individual and self-interested, but united and shared by the countries that border it and those that do not, while in various ways having an interest in Mediterranean policies. An approach capable of easing the many regional conflicts arising on the surface, in the depths and along the shores of the sea, and then, from the sea, extending to the continents.

Among the different problems involving the Mediterranean – and calling for far-sighted political vision – is the extremely urgent issue of migration, which has always been close to my heart and indeed motivated my first apostolic visit, to the island of Lampedusa in 2013. The events of these past years have shown ever more clearly that effective intervention can only result from a combined effort, one not limited to the border countries but shared by the continents of which they are part. No one should be left alone to manage this enormous problem. Everyone needs to feel responsible, for everyone is in fact responsible, as we are reminded by God's question to Cain in the first pages of the Bible: "Where is your brother?" (cf. Gen 4:9).

The migration issue demonstrates once more that everything is connected. It also reminds us any stable solution calls for an approach capable of taking into account its multiple aspects. The discussions taking place during this Conference will be able to shed greater light on these.

I wish to note that the Mediterranean is at the centre of the Church's constant attention. In these very days, as your Conference meets, I will be making an apostolic journey to Cyprus and Greece. I would also mention the fruitful meeting held last year in Bari on "The Mediterranean as a Frontier of Peace", organized by the Italian Bishops Conference, which included the participation of Bishops from fully twenty countries bordering this mare nostrum. That meeting will be followed by another next year in Florence, which is presently in the planning stage.

It is my hope that these ecclesial events, as well as your own exchanges on the Mediterranean, can draw inspiration from the "Mediterranean Discussions" organized by Giorgio La Pira in the 50's and 60's of last century. Thanks to the growth of a politics of dialogue, the opposite shores of the sea were brought closer together around what La Pira considered, from a perspective of faith, as "a great sea of Tiberias".

With this hope, I wish all of you a fruitful gathering and, together with the assurance of my prayers, I invoke upon you God's blessing.

From the Vatican, 20 November 2021

FRANCIS
