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BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 230611a

Sunday 11.06.2023

Message of the Holy Father to members of the Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the president, Dr. Manfred Weber, and the members of the Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament:

Message of the Holy Father

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am pleased to address a cordial greeting to you, members of the Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament, an institution I visited in November 2014, and I would like to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you.

The first: you are parliamentarians; therefore, you are *representatives* of the citizens who have entrusted you with a mandate. When there were the first elections to the European Parliament, people were interested, it was a novelty, an important step forward in the construction of a united Europe. But, as always, as time goes by, interest wanes; and so, the relationship between citizens and parliamentarians must be cultivated. This is a classic problem of representative democracies. And if it is difficult to keep this connection alive within each country, all the more so for the European Parliament, which is even more "remote". But on the other hand, communication today can help a great deal to overcome distances.

A second point: *pluralism*. It is clear that a large parliamentary group must foresee a certain internal pluralism. However, on some issues in which primary ethical values and important points of Christian social doctrine are at stake, it is necessary to be united. This seems to me to be a particularly interesting aspect, because it calls for consideration of the ongoing formation of parliamentarians. It is normal that you too need moments of study and reflection in which to explore and discuss the most ethically relevant matters. It is an exciting challenge, which is played out above all at the level of conscience, and which sheds light on the qualities of those who engage in politics. The Christian politician should be distinguished by the seriousness with which he or she confronts

issues, rejecting opportunistic solutions and always holding firm to the criteria of the dignity of the person and the common good.

In this regard, you have a very rich heritage to draw from in order to bring your original contribution to European politics, that is, the *social doctrine of the Church*. Think, for example, of the two principles of *solidarity* and *subsidiarity*, and their virtuous dynamic. There are ethical and political aspects, linked to each one of these two principles, that you share with colleagues of different affiliations, who respectively emphasize one or the other; but the interweaving of the two, the fact of activating them together and making them work in a complementary fashion is proper to Christian-inspired social and economic thought, and is therefore particularly entrusted to your care.

Another aspect that is analogous to this is the vision of a Europe that holds *unity* and *diversity* together. This is fundamental; I had the chance to highlight it recently during my visit to Hungary. A Europe that fully appreciates the different cultures of which it is composed, its enormous wealth of traditions, languages, identities, which are those of its people and their histories; and that is capable, at the same time, with its institutions and its political and cultural initiatives, to ensure that this very rich mosaic composes coherent forms.

This is why it takes a strong inspiration, a “soul”; I like to say that it takes “dreams”. It takes lofty values, and a high political vision. I do not intend by this to diminish the importance of ordinary management, of good normal administration; on the contrary, if this is good, that is already a great achievement. But it is not enough; it is not enough to support a Europe that finds itself having to face the great global challenges of the 21st century. To face such challenges as a united Europe requires a high and strong inspiration. And you, I would like to say, should be the first to cherish the examples and the teachings of the founding fathers of this Europe. The original pledge, which can also be the current pledge, is to aim not only at an organization that protects the interests of the European nations, but rather a union where everyone can live a “life that is humane, fraternal and just”. [1]

I would like to highlight this term: *fraternal*. As you know, fraternity and social friendship are the great “dream” that I have shared with the entire Church and all men and women of good will (cf. Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 8). I think that fraternity can also be a source of inspiration for those who today want to reanimate Europe, in order that it fully respond to the expectations both of its peoples and of the entire world. Because a project for Europe today can only be a worldwide project. I believe that Christian politicians today should be recognized by their ability to translate the great dream of fraternity into concrete actions of good politics at all levels: local, national, international. For example, it seems to me that challenges such as that of migration, or care for the planet, can only be faced by starting from this great inspiring principle: human fraternity.

Dear friends, let us remember the origins: let us not forget how a united Europe was born; let us not forget the tragedies of the wars of the 20th century. The gradual and patient work of building a united Europe, first in specific areas, then in increasingly general ones: what did it have as its inspiration? What ideal, if not that of generating a space where one can live in freedom, justice and peace, respecting everyone in diversity? Today this project is put to the test in a globalized world, but it can be relaunched drawing from the original inspiration, which is more relevant and fruitful than ever, not only for Europe, but for the entire human family.

And I would like to conclude with a final observation: who are those who most live a united Europe? You have taught me: they are the young. Today one starts to spend study periods abroad early; then, for university, especially for specializations, the horizon is European; and so on for the search for work... I do not refer to the sad necessity, which unfortunately exists, to go elsewhere for the lack of opportunities at home; no, rather, the fact that for the young it has now become normal to carry out the initial part of their studies in their own country, and then to specialize in another. A bit like it was in the Middle Ages, when one studied a little in Padua, a little in Paris, a little in Oxford or in Heidelberg... Let us look at them, the young, and think of a Europe and a world that live up to their dreams.

I therefore encourage you to go forward with courage and hope, with God’s help. May the Gospel be your lodestar and the social doctrine of the Church your compass. I heartily bless you all, and your loved ones. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

Rome, Agostino Gemelli University Hospital, 9 June 2023

[1] P.H. Spaak, *Address delivered on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty of Rome*, 25 March 1957.
