



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
FOR THE OPENING OF THE EUROPEAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DAYS***

(Bratislava, 17-20 March 2022)

To my dear brother Archbishop Gintaras Grušas
Archbishop of Vilnius and President of CCEE

On the occasion of the Third European Catholic Social Days, organized by the CCEE together with the COMECE and the Slovak Bishops' Conference in Bratislava from 17 to 20 March, I would like to extend my cordial greetings to you, dear Brother, and to all the participants.

What we have experiencing in recent weeks is not what we had hoped for after the difficult health emergency caused by the pandemic, which made us experience a sign of powerlessness and fear, together with the fragile condition of our existence. The tragedy of the war that is taking place in the heart of Europe leaves us astonished; we never thought we would see such scenes again, reminiscent of the great wars of the last century. The heartbreaking cry for help of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters urges us as a community of believers not only to reflect seriously, but to cry with them and to do something for them; to share the anguish of a people whose identity, history and tradition have been wounded. The blood and tears of children, the suffering of women and men who are defending their land or fleeing from bombs rattle our conscience. Once again humanity is threatened by a perverse abuse of power and partisan interests, which condemns defenseless people to suffer all forms of brutal violence.

I thank all of you, dear Brothers in the episcopate, for your prompt and concerted response in coming to the aid of that population, guaranteeing it material aid, welcome and hospitality. Let us not grow weary in this, and let us not cease to invoke peace from God and from men. I therefore urge you to continue to pray that those who hold the fate of nations will leave no stone unturned to stop the war and open a constructive dialogue to put an end to the immense humanitarian tragedy it is causing.

Today more than ever it is urgent to review the style and effectiveness of the *ars politica*. In the face of the many changes we are witnessing at international level, it is our duty to make possible “the development of a global community of fraternity based on the practice of social friendship on the part of peoples and nations” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 154). War, which “leaves our world worse than it was before” and is “a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation ... before the forces of evil” (261), may in this sense provoke an opposite reaction, a commitment to re-establish an architecture of peace at the global level (cf. 231), in which the European house, born to guarantee peace after the world wars, has a primary role.

The title you have chosen for these days, *Europe beyond the pandemic: a new beginning*, invites us to reflect on the transition taking place in European society. This period, still conditioned by the pandemic, has brought about significant social, economic, cultural and even ecclesial changes. In this situation marked by suffering, fears have grown, poverty has increased and loneliness has multiplied; while many have lost their jobs and are living precariously, the way of relating to others has changed for everyone. In this context, even ecclesial life has not been spared from many difficulties, especially due to the limitation of pastoral activities.

We cannot stand idly by; as Christians and as European citizens, we are called to implement courageously what one of the great founding fathers of the European Community, Alcide De Gasperi, said when he spoke of “the common good of our European homelands, of our homeland Europe” (*Address to the European Parliamentary Conference*, 21 April 1954). Yes, Europe and the nations that compose it are not opposed to each other, and building the future does not mean unifying, but uniting even more in respect for diversity. For Christians, rebuilding the common house means “becoming artisans of communion, weavers of unity at every level: not by stratagems but by the Gospel” (*Homily at the Mass with the Council of Bishops’ Conferences of Europe*, 23 September 2021). In other words, we need to start again from the very heart of the Gospel: Jesus Christ and his saving love. This is the ever-new proclamation to be brought to the world, first of all through the witness of lives that show the beauty of the encounter with God and of love for neighbour.

This is well expressed by the image you have chosen as the logo for these Days: that of Saint Martin of Tours cutting his cloak in two to give it to a poor man. It reminds us that love is genuine closeness, sharing, caring for others. Those who love overcome fear and mistrust of those who come to our borders in search of a better life: if welcoming, protecting, accompanying and integrating so many brothers and sisters fleeing from conflict, famine and poverty is right and human, it is even more Christian. May the walls still present in Europe be transformed into doors of access to its heritage of history, faith, art and culture; may dialogue and social friendship be promoted, so that human coexistence based on fraternity may grow.

I entrust your work, dear Brother, to the maternal intercession of the Mother of the Church and Queen of Peace, and to the protection of the patron saints of Europe. I bless you from my heart

and I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 15 March 2022

FRANCIS

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