

Paris, Saturday 3 October 2009

**MESSAGE ADOPTED BY THE PARTICIPANTS
AT CCEE PLENARY ASSEMBLY – Paris, 1 to 4 October 2009**

EUROPE, BE CONFIDENT

**Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall,
rediscover a new impetus, there is hope to proclaim**

Twenty years ago, we witnessed a great moment: the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was a turning point that did not simply come out of the blue. It came as a result of determined and bold men who did not lack their own freedom. It was preceded by the many sacrifices of those who risked their lives and who fought for that same freedom. We think of Solidarnosc and of the many battles fought for solidarity and respect for human dignity in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. How can we fail to pay tribute here to the fundamental role of Pope John Paul II and his forward-looking vision of a Europe based on the foundations of faith, the common good and peace? Many have seen in the fall of the Berlin Wall the collapse of other walls: those of hatred, fear, lies and of pitiless ideology.

This new liberty offered to all has been a time of grace for the Churches. They have found anew a freedom of action, of organisation and of evangelization. Even though this process has not been completed fully in all countries, nor have the conflicts linked to the past really gone away, we realize how far we have come in twenty years. As Bishops of Europe, we see in this liberation a sign of the times and we thank God, Lord of time and history.

All that has happened since the fall of the Berlin Wall has been a great stepping stone in the European adventure. Many Europeans have met, have visited each other and have reread history together. They have learned how to know each other, to discover what they have in common and to better understand their differences. The wave of migration between European countries has undoubtedly contributed to the promotion of well-being, while at the same time it has brought about new difficulties, dividing families or forcing them to be uprooted from their normal daily life.

Twenty years later, we now see that the incredible European project, with a strong ethical basis, has greatly weakened. The very poor turnout in the latest European Parliamentary elections was a tell-tale sign. The hopes placed on building Europe have not so far been fulfilled. Here we take note of the influence of several factors:

- The development of the European Union has gone hand in hand with a growth in consumption, at least for some people. The mere constant acquisition of goods will never fill peoples hearts. As Christ said: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4, 4). The rules of the market and competition will never give birth to the ideal.

- Present society wishes to give to the individual every possible opportunity to exercise individual choice and to seek personal fulfilment. In doing so it risks simply locking the individual into the defence of self-interest or acquired benefits. Pope Benedict XVI has denounced “cupidity” as the hidden engine of the severe global economic and financial crisis that we are going through. A society in which each individual, each group, each nation defends only their own vested interests cannot but be the jungle. Without justice, without sharing, without solidarity, social life sinks into violence. We should not be surprised then if mafia and terrorist organizations thrive against this background. Social peace and globalization with a human face, call today for a different solidarity and a different generosity!
- A pluralistic society often risks being tempted by relativism, and particularly by ethical relativism. Each person sets their own norms and claims their own rights. Social life can only rest on common rules, on a vision of humanity that does not change according to shifting lobbies or opinion polls. A number of legislative developments in our countries and in the European institutions are of concern to us as they go against authentic good. We are aware therefore of the urgency to match juridical norms with natural law - which is based in human dignity and thereby determines the inalienable rights and duties of every person. These norms should be characterized by dialogue, respect for freedom and a sincere quest for the truth.

The crisis sweeping Europe today is serious. Low birth rates and the future of its demography do not lead to optimism. However, we do not intend to be prophets of doom. Things are not necessarily doomed to get worse! Our faith calls us turn our attention to the European society in which we live, and to gaze on it with hope.

We recognize that many of our contemporaries aspire to a life that can be a source of inner peace, joy and trust. Many young people are ready to commit themselves to greater fellowship and solidarity in the world. To promote the common good and respect for the environment, men and women are prepared to make sacrifices to be shared by others. The defence of life, from conception to natural death, is not a lost cause. We firmly believe in it!

We are saying this not by virtue of human optimism, but because we uphold a vision of humanity that is at the disposal, today as it has always been, for the building-up of Europe. It comes from the Gospel, and we believe it can be shared by many. Pope Benedict XVI said recently: “Precisely because the Gospel is not an ideology, it does not presume to lock evolving socio-political realities into rigid schemes. Rather it transcends the vicissitudes of this world and casts new light on the dignity of the human person in every age.” (*Ecumenical Gathering, Prague, 27 September 2009*).

Building Europe is truly an enterprise worth the effort. Everyone can find their own place, everyone is welcome. More than ever the road opens before us. It is not a time to slow down or to sit on the sidelines. Let us not forget that we are the disciples of the One who says to each of us: “Do not be afraid! Get up and walk!”

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