

**Address by Mgr Defois on the occasion of the launching of the French presidency of  
Justice and Peace Europe  
Belgrade 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2008**

**Europe as a project of solidarity**

Dear friends,

At the moment of taking over the responsibility of the presidency of our Conference, it is of course to my predecessor I turn.

Yes, dear Leo, as you have just said, the last three years were three good years. And speaking for all of us, I would like to thank you most heartily. In finding support in the work having been carried out by our Swiss friends, being surrounded by a solid team, you have made it possible for us, with your own proper touch, to deepen the cooperation between us. You have had the audacity to propose new ways of working together, and we have been able to appreciate the fruits of them during this session. But this has been made possible only thanks to your own personal implication; and also thanks to your determination to weave bonds, patiently, to further in our way the rapprochement between our peoples; and also thanks to your concern to remind us of the spiritual dimension of our common mission.

Thanks also to you Jörg, who have orchestrated our work with passion and conviction; thanks to you Paulis, who have made it possible for us to carry out our work smoothly; and we will not forget Susanne, who has worked discreetly in the background.

All these words only to be able to say, that to succeed you is not a small affair. But it is also an opportunity.

An opportunity to confront the challenges we have before us. And who would question that the European challenge is an immense one?

The events in Kosovo, whose reality some of us have come in close contact with during the last couple of days, and the crises in Georgia that took place in the middle of summer remind us, as if there is need to do so, that reconciliation and peace between peoples remain the horizon. It goes through a memory work, which is always in the process of evolution, in order to arrive at a shared history. This was the issue during our meetings under the presidency of

our German friends. This eye on things passed constitutes the very base on which it is possible to build, and we need to always have it present in our spirit. But reconciliation and peace cannot become reality if we do not also create new solidarities that consolidate our desire to live together in Europe and, beyond it, with the rest of the world. It is the understanding and the credibility of the European project, which are at stake. In other words, we need to recover the profound inspiration of this European project - "its soul" as Jacques Delors would put it.

This profound inspiration is *the choice asserted by solidarity*, as it was of the Europeans assembled in The Hague already in 1948.

- Solidarity chosen to overcome hatred and tie bonds of friendship,
- Solidarity chosen to share the prosperity between Europeans, but not only. Already in the discourse of Schuman, solidarity with the rest of the world presents itself as a priority and is raised to the rank of a moral value.

In order to become anew a shared project capable of mobilizing energy and will, Europe has to respond to a triple challenge:

- The challenge of **economic solidarity**.

We need to invent new solidarities in the midst of the EU, where a certain homogeneity in the level of living has been replaced by important inequalities opening up the way for corruption, but also with our neighbors, candidates or not for integration.

We need to invent new solidarities with the rest of the world, especially when the negotiations of economic partnership agreements risk weakening the privileged relations of the EU with its partners in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific in question.

We need to invent new solidarities as the current growth of the world economy generates new inequalities that weaken not only the European social model but also the conception of a human globalization

- We need to respond to a second challenge, not a lesser one, and that is the one of **political solidarity**.

How do we go beyond current antagonisms and hate in which the threats of a breakup are more real than merely imagined? How do we, in a post-Soviet context, build relations with Russia, relations that are other than a mere relationship of power?

- Lastly we need to respond to the challenge of **cultural and spiritual openness**.

In a time when the mixing of populations gives the old continent a new face, which is more multi-cultural and more multi-religious, the temptations of an identity fallback are strong. There is a crisis of the European identity that has repercussions on the consciences, a race between private interests, a restriction to nationalist interests. How do we go about to live plurality as an enrichment and not as a threat? How can our commissions work in that direction?

Through these challenges it is the question of living together that comes up to the surface, the question of the cohesion of the European society, the question of the foundation on which Europe is constructing itself. We need to work to transform our interdependence into a true solidarity (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* n°39) on the economic level, in the international relations, and on the cultural and spiritual level. In other words, we have to work to make Europe an authentic project of solidarity. That is what we propose to you for the coming three years, while each year investing ourselves more specifically in one of these dimensions.

According to our means, with the methods that we have experienced, but in trying to take one more step forward, we can take part in this great project for a Europe based on solidarity.

In order to do so we will continue on the road of **cooperation** between our commissions using the methods that have permitted us to improve our common work: international work-shops, concerted actions, general assemblies and meetings of the Secretaries Generals, Exposure and Dialogue Programs (EDP). Our methods of work say already in themselves something about the world we want to build. But without a doubt we need to further develop our multilateral actions that allow each commission to move forward in its own rhythm, according to its priorities, while we still retain a common word in the public debate. These actions also strengthen the mutual acquaintance between us, and weave beneficial bonds to the whole.

We would like to encourage each commission to contribute its proper sensitivity. We would like to encourage the debate of principle, because as Leo so well put it a moment ago, the richness of the Conference consists of the national commissions. That is why we propose to you that during the months separating two general assemblies you express yourselves on the theme of the year with the final objective, if we can achieve it, to arrive at a common text that expresses the message of Justice and Peace.

This new proposition for our common work joins a strong concern that I have:

**communication.**

As I joined you in Kiev last year, I was struck while listening to you by the richness and the quality of the deliberations, the projects. But who knows about them? Who lets them resound? We need to improve our communication, which is a difficult task in this world of ours. But on it depends also the fruit that we will be able to contribute to the world of today. This concern must not be something that is exclusive for the presidency. Each one of you is called to relay our work to the media of her or his country. Some of you will be solicited to help us translate certain pages of our Internet site into different languages.

Moreover, we have already together chosen to make one step further. We have decided to establish a permanent secretariat. This is so far just a decision of principle. As the time of establishment comes, each commission needs to honestly ask itself the question:

- What do we expect of this secretariat?
- What are we prepared to do for it?
- To what extent are we prepared to commit ourselves?

I leave these questions for you to meditate.

To finish, at the very moment of succeeding Leo, I would like to thank you for your confidence, and to express my confidence in each one of you. We have an exciting task before us. After all, Justice and Peace is not just another NGO.

As Christians we have the duty to stand up for hope and human dignity. We have the duty to be *agitators of hope*, a hope that is waiting for the Spirit and the values that transcend the passions and the violence. We have the duty to be witnesses of love as a “fraternal breathing” and a willingness to go beyond vengeance. Prayer, which is neither “refuge in times of panic” nor “evasion facing our responsibilities” (Cardinal Etchegaray in Lebanon August 15, 2006) must be our “hotbed”.

Dear friends, this is the road that we propose to you to walk together. And thus, as we affirmed it in The Hague some days ago while celebrating the jubilee of Viktor, the commissions of Justice and Peace will be able to contribute to change the world.