

Final Press Release of the II Catholic Social Days for Europe *Jointly issued by CCEE & COMECE*

Towards a Europe of greater fraternity and solidarity

Europe is a community of life and destiny. Facing the social crisis, Christians have all the tools at their disposal to fashion a Europe of greater fraternity and solidarity that puts people at the heart of its project. The current crisis offers Christians an opportunity to engage in innovative and decided ways for a Europe of solidarity and peace.

This is the feeling that emerges from the interaction between the participants, lay, religious and bishops, who gathered on the occasion of the 2nd Catholic Social Days for Europe. The meeting in Madrid witnessed an exchange of grass roots experience, debate of ideas and moments of communion and prayer. It helped to highlight the richness and diversity of the commitment of Christians in society.

The meeting, promoted by the two European Episcopal organisations, COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community) and CCEE (Council of European Bishops' Conferences), in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Madrid, was organized in cooperation with the Spanish Bishops' Conference. About 200 participants delegated by the Bishops' Conferences in Europe or from association and ecclesial bodies from the continent, representing 31 countries, gathered around the theme "The Christian faith and the future of Europe."

Prof. Javier Maria Prades opened the inaugural session with a lecture on the concept of the human person. There were three plenary sessions dedicated to three major themes. The first session, in which **Cardinal Reinhard Marx**, President of COMECE, was the keynote speaker, was entitled "Crisis or Change?". An attempt was made to describe the current state of play of the economic and social crisis in Europe and the various challenges that today confront the Europeans. He also examined in detail the need to steer European integration towards a more social Europe, and had suggestions on how this should be done. Christians are called more than ever to take part in this venture, driven by their faith and their rich experience in the social field.

Prof. Stefano Zamagni was the keynote speaker of the second session, dedicated to re-thinking economy and work. He warned about the fact that our national welfare policies are structured around the individual, when they should more take into account the needs of the family.

Finally, **Breda O'Brien** and **Prof. Balázs Shanda** were the two keynote speakers of the third session dedicated to "The human person and the family as the basis of society and human rights". Breda O'Brien, a journalist and mother, invited to develop a theology of marriage that is rooted more in the lived reality of the spouses. For his part, Prof. Shanda, speaking about human dignity as the foundation of human rights, described the attempts to change laws that affect this dignity. Whilst recognizing the importance for Christians to continue to serve the common good on the legislative level, he concluded that it is nevertheless in the field of education that Christians will be able to raise awareness of the need to respect the dignity of every human being.

The sessions were enriched by stories of people engaged in the social field, with witnesses from the world of business, politics, the voluntary sector and church-based communities. An additional part of the meeting took the form of working groups devoted to topics such as: the future of young people in Europe, the phenomenon of migration, solidarity between generations, the culture of volunteerism, educational freedom, political family and human life in a technological society.

Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, Vice-President of the CCEE, reminded participants that all these challenges can be faced by the Church. The condition is that Christians, moved by their faith, are prepared to move out of their comfort zones to encounter their brother or sister where they are.

Participants were encouraged in their work by a message from **Pope Francis**.

Finally, at the Vigil of Prayer for Europe organized on Saturday evening in the Cathedral of the Almudena, the people of Madrid were able to join the delegates to pray for peace in Europe, in the Middle East and for critical situations in the rest of the world. Special prayers were offered for the visit of Pope Francis to the European Parliament on 25 November. The youth orchestra and choir of Madrid WYD provided the music.

The meeting ended Sunday with a Mass presided by **Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela**, Apostolic Administrator of Madrid.

All texts and photos sessions of the meeting are available on the website www.catholicdays.eu