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## **Msgr. Crociata (COMECE): “The Union's future is being played out at the crossroads of civilisations”**

The human person must always be at the centre of every social and political decision, otherwise “our humanity will be in danger” and Europe will be facing the “end of civilisation.” Monsignor **Mariano Crociata**, President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), who has just returned from Marseille, reflects on the outcomes of the Mediterranean meetings. From 17 to 24 September, a total of 70 bishops and 70 young people discussed - separately and together - the major challenges facing the five shores of the Mediterranean basin, ranging from migration to climate change, peace and education for young people. The conference was brought to a close by Pope Francis, who knelt with the religious leaders for a moment of remembrance and prayer for the migrants lost at sea before the final session in the Palais du Pharo, with strong words also for Europe. **In Marseille, the Pope said that today we are at a “crossroads of civilisation”:** “**on the one hand, there is fraternity, which makes the human community flourish with goodness; on the other, indifference, which bloodies the Mediterranean.**” **Monsignor Crociata, where is Europe headed?** The crossroads of civilisation that the Pope referred to in Marseilles is the same crossroads that the European Union, and in some ways the whole of Europe, is facing yet again.

It is a crossroads where the very future of the EU is at stake.

While it is hard to imagine that it will collapse, there is no glimpse of the future that awaits it without concrete steps towards greater unity. Unity is possible provided we choose the path of civilisation. The Pope has shown it in the path of fraternity. The point is indeed crucial, as evidenced during the moment of prayer for the sailors and migrants who died at sea held at the shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde. Here it was perceivable with great clarity that for us all, and for European countries, the question is whether or not the human person remains the guiding principle behind every social and political decision. In this respect, we are facing a crossroads of civilisation. If this is not understood, our humanity will be in danger. Because it will mean that we are entering a future where people can be used or ignored or simply erased depending on the whim of the moment. But that will be the sign (and the reality) of the end of civilisation. **You have attended the Mediterranean meetings. What perspectives, concerns and challenges have emerged?** The Mediterranean countries are very different in terms of their social, economic, political and religious situations. Suffice it to recall the main issues raised during the debate: freedom of conscience and religious freedom; access to employment, social conditions and migratory flows; the environmental problem, which is dramatically linked to the latter; the challenge of education; conflicts of all kinds, including war. The challenges are indeed great. Nevertheless, there are signs of hope. One of these emerged during the meetings, thanks to the presence of some 60 young people from all the Mediterranean countries. A new generation is emerging, one that knows how to build bonds, make plans and look to the future, one that is no longer content to endure a state of defeat and despair. It is a question of strengthening a grounded hope that asks hearts to open up to its signs and prospects. **What are the bishops and young people of the Mediterranean countries asking of the European Union and its Member States?** All international institutions and organisations, and to some extent all countries, are concerned, because all global geopolitical issues are to some extent connected with the Mediterranean region. The issues that have been discussed, to be precise, call into question the European Union in particular. Starting with migration. This is a challenge for the European institutions, because the initiatives taken so far have had no impact on the migratory flows, which are increasing uncontrollably, at least under the measures taken so far. Consensus and a common vision are needed to define a strategy that includes effective measures at the various stages of the

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migration process, up to the countries of departure. The need for rationalisation and order must be met by protecting the integrity and dignity of people, by planning reception and integration to an extent that is objectively sustainable for the host country, and by establishing a responsible relationship with the migrants' country of origin. In this regard, since its creation, the European Union has had the task of establishing structural relations with African countries. Today, more than ever before, the issue of migration can only be addressed if there is an organic framework of reference and a broad consensus on decisions. **The Pope denounced deaths at sea, which he called "crimes against humanity", in very strong terms. He also spoke of the difficulties involved in rescues at sea. He said: "These are acts of hatred against our brothers and sisters under the guise of 'balance'." Can Europe rise to the challenge of this emergency today? And how, in concrete terms?** There are many political initiatives to address the major problems facing the peoples of the Mediterranean today, but the disagreement of a few sometimes slows down action to the point of paralysing it. The EU is more capable than ever of meeting the challenge, but it will be able to do so with a different participatory force and a different capacity for vision and initiative. Dealing with migration requires a determination to tackle it head on and to act decisively. It should be remembered that it is not only the electorate's verdict that is at stake, but also the verdict of those who, in the not-too-distant future, will bitterly note that a whole generation lacked the clarity and determination to grasp the scale of the problem and to seek an organic solution. There is a danger that an entire political class and public opinion will prove inadequate to meet the challenge that history has placed before all of us today. **The Pope has put forward the proposal of a "Conference of Bishops of the Mediterranean", which would provide further opportunities for exchange and give greater "ecclesial representativeness to the region". What do you think about this, and what is the mission of the Churches of the Mediterranean today in relation to Europe and to the world that is knocking desperately at its doors?** The issue of immigration is the one that most dramatically marks a contemporary challenge for our countries, encompassing all the thorny social and political issues of our time. The Church is not a neutral observer of a process that does not concern her; on the contrary, she is part of it with the responsibility of the Gospel and the conscience given to her by faith. Our Churches are called, in addition to their capacity for initiative, to develop a common vision along with a spirit of initiative and an effort of imagination on the worrying issues that trouble the Mediterranean region. They know that it is inherent in the faith, and so it is ultimately a requirement of being true to oneself. In their spiritual and pastoral sharing, they must anticipate the collective awareness and unity required of the Mediterranean countries. The Marseille initiative, following those of Bari and Florence, confirms that the Churches of the Mediterranean are called to an historic task of service to the faith and to their peoples. And the two cannot be separated. The idea of a permanent instrument for listening and prayer, for reflection and the elaboration of common initiatives, naturally attracts the attention of those who have perceived the importance and the value of these days. European ecclesial bodies, such as the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), do not intend to remain inactive, within the limits of their competence and where necessary, in order not to miss this appointment with history.

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