
Next Generation EU. Msgr. Hérouard (COMECE): “No one is saved alone!”

“Today no country has the capacity to save itself alone.” That's why it's necessary to face the consequences of the crisis “together and with a renewed spirit of solidarity between the Member States”. This is the message of the COMECE bishops to the European Union today, with the publication of a statement in which they express their position on the Next Generation EU plan presented yesterday by Ursula von der Leyen. A 750 billion euro recovery fund for Europe. “We consider it to be a concrete expression of the need for solidarity among European countries”, said Msgr. **Antoine Hérouard**, President of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission that drafted the communiqué. “Problems broke out at the beginning of the health crisis. Each Country acted on its own and some, like Italy, felt abandoned by others. This proposal features a very different attitude on an economic and social level alike, which I believe is a positive development.” **But it's not the last word. The proposal will now be examined by the European Council on 19 June in order to obtain a unanimous go-ahead from its 27 member governments. It will then be once again submitted to the European Parliament for approval. The dividing lines between Countries most affected by the epidemic, asking for help and solidarity, and the more “rigorous” Countries, could still thus still weigh down. What are you asking of the EU in this delicate phase of its history?** To return to the foundations of the European Constitution, to the reasons why it was decided to share a given number of policies. As everyone knows, the Union was a deeply desired and longed-for project to foster and strengthen the peace process after the Second World War, through the creation of solid bonds between European countries. Perhaps its very origins have been somewhat forgotten in recent years, viewed as belonging to a bygone era. *Nonetheless, we must make the effort to renew the spirit of our founding fathers. These divisions risk alienating the peoples of Europe from the institutions. What does the European Union risk today and what opportunities may emerge from this crisis?* The main risk is division, and with division the end of European integration, because if everyone decides to go their own way, then one may legitimately ask: why persist with this project of a common future? *The risk is to lose everything that has been achieved over the years, the free movement of people, free trade, the Euro currency.* However, there may arise the opportunity to rediscover - in the light of this crisis - the spirit of solidarity between European countries and take a step forward in the development of a project centred on people, on the human dimension, and not only on financial interests. **So what are the “lessons” to be learned from the Coronavirus ordeal?** Covid-19 has evidenced two things. The first is that at least in the beginning there was a lack of solidarity, a lack of readiness to help the countries most affected by the epidemic. The second is that if we are to confront the serious negative consequences of this crisis on the economy and society, we need to act together. *No country has the capacity to save itself alone. It's no longer possible.* **In the communiqué, the COMECE bishops propose three courses of action based on the concept of ecological, social and contributive justice. What is your core message?** People have a very profound and deeply rooted concern for greater justice for all. Yet justice must not be just a slogan. It must have a very specific content. It must be ecological justice. Clearly, we must change our consumption and production patterns. Social justice must be strengthened because the health crisis - like all crises - creates injustices and disparities between those who can continue standing on their own two feet and those who stay on the margins. Then there is financial and fiscal justice, since tax evasion does not benefit the poorest and weakest in society. **In short, also the EU must emerge from this crisis transformed. It must emerge transformed, but I would also add that Europe is expected to act.** We are facing a broken world. There is a growing divide between the United States and China, between the poor countries of the South and wealthy countries. Europe can play a major role in redressing the balance. It is its duty.

