

The first Catholic Social Days for Europe
8-11 October 2009, Gdansk (Poland) FINAL

"Solidarity is the future of Europe"

"Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams,
your young men shall see visions" (Joel, 2:28)

1. On 1 September 1939, gunshots on the Westerplatte signalled the start of the most bloody conflict in world history, culminating in the loss of more than 60 million lives. From the quest for reconciliation that followed this tragedy grew the project of freedom, peace and progress we now know as the European Union.

Seventy years later, the first Catholic Social Days for Europe have brought delegations from 29 European countries to Gdansk; a city where the struggle waged by workers and intellectuals to restore the human and social dimensions of work paved the way towards the fall of the Iron Curtain and European reunification.

Here in Gdansk, in what we hope will be the first of many gatherings of this kind, we have reflected on the meaning of solidarity and its future in Europe. Drawing inspiration from the Gospel and the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church, we offer proposals for the promotion of the Common Good in Europe.

2. We believe that our generation is called on to take up again the challenge of creating a strategy for the Common Good, based on the principle: "Serve one another in love" (Gal 5:13). This requires that the social institutions respect spaces for autonomous action, enabling every person to reach his or her full potential. This can only be achieved if our institutions are infused with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity.

This strategy presupposes a just democracy, which can only work with the responsible contribution of everyone. Selfish behaviour, utilitarianism and materialism need to give way to sharing, as has been clearly demonstrated by the current economic crisis. Solidarity must be the guiding principle for economic activity. The inalienable dignity of human life from the moment of conception to natural death must be respected. This includes the stranger who knocks at our doors and the generations to come.

We live in societies which have developed a considerable awareness of individual rights, even going so far as to claim no responsibility other than towards oneself. We stress that solidarity is a duty inherent to each one of us and that, only under this condition, do we prevent rights becoming merely arbitrary.

We should not be afraid: solidarity is our common future. The unity of Europe has been the dream of some. It has become a hope for many. Today it is our duty to ensure that it continues to serve the objective of global solidarity.

We should avoid the danger of falling into apathy or a new nihilism. We need to place more trust in the creativity of human beings in order to shape a Europe based on values.

3. For us, solidarity means a personal and collective engagement in three main directions:

Solidarity between generations:

- promote and protect the family, based on the marriage of a man and a woman and create the conditions to enable parents to raise children and to harmonise family life and professional life;
- implement a common European policy on immigration and asylum, recognising the human dignity of every migrant with consequent rights and responsibilities, as the bases for their integration;
- re-orientate our personal way of living and the economic growth to reduce our ecological footprint

and the consumption of non-renewable natural resources in general, in order to pass on a habitable planet to future generations.

Solidarity within Europe:

- place the economy at the service of all, recognising the value of human work, in all its forms: paid and unpaid, charitable and voluntary work; adapt the European social market economy to new challenges;
- protect the most vulnerable among us, enhance social justice and equality of opportunities for all in our societies, taking more effective measures to reduce poverty and social exclusion;
- promote a policy of financial regulation at EU level and support efficient international governing structures.

Solidarity between Europe and the rest of the world

- keep our promise to developing countries and promote co-development with the poorest countries of the world, particularly those of the African continent;
- further develop fair trade practices, on both a national and European level;
- promote peace and justice, based on respect for human dignity, human rights and especially freedom of religion.

To fully implement these objectives, public finances, on both a national and EU level, should be set up accordingly.

All European citizens who share these views will have to personally commit themselves to their realisation and to take political responsibilities at all relevant levels.

4. The call to promote the integral development of people and peoples is a vocation that makes us who we are. As Christians we are open to transcendence. It is our vocation to welcome the gift of fraternity and trust in the Providence of God, becoming his instruments, even if this demands personal sacrifice.

Europe needs men and women, formed in the faith, ready to receive others, in the name of Jesus Christ, with outstretched arms and committed to building together relationships and institutions of solidarity, in the service of the people of our time and mindful of the generations to come. We wish also to continue to dialogue and work with men and women of different beliefs in pursuit of the Common Good.