

Solidarity in Europe and Worldwide

To overcome the devastation of the Second World War one of the founding fathers of Europe, Robert Schuman, proposed in May 1950, precisely 70 years ago, "creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it."¹ Schuman was counting on a "solidarity of action" that would grow "from concrete achievements". From this impulse of the convinced Christian Schuman, Europe in its present form has grown and is now once again challenged by the COVID19 pandemic.

As Christian lay movements, convinced of the values that support and guide us and our European Union, we must draw the right conclusions from the present situation. We are convinced of the power of the community of European states, which have joined in solidarity and of their own free will to secure peace and prosperity on our continent and beyond.

In his Easter message 2020, Pope Francis called for a "further proof of solidarity, also by turning to innovative solutions"². He emphasizes "a concrete spirit of solidarity, [...] especially in the present circumstances, that these rivalries do not regain force, but that all recognize themselves as part of a single family and support one another."

The virus spread shows how deeply connected we are in Europe and throughout the world. It does not know borders. National aid packages on their own are not the solution. We welcome the steps already taken at national and European level to boost health cross national cooperation. The same applies to other major challenges of our time, especially the global flows of migrants and the ongoing climate change. Both have to receive a strong cooperative response from our European nations. This includes, above all, mutual assistance, and solidarity with one another. It should take place on three levels:

Interpersonal solidarity

In our close neighbourhood solidarity shows itself in practical charity, in consideration and mutual attentiveness. In such times, it manifests itself, for example, in the support of particularly vulnerable groups: Elderly, weak and sick people, for whom younger people go shopping and tell them over the phone that they are not alone. It also shows itself in the economic support for all those who are endangered by the restrictions in their existence, materially - because they have lost their jobs or psychologically - because they see themselves in a hopeless situation. We welcome the numerous initiatives witnessing in all our countries this culture of attention for the neighbour which Christians should support and cherish above all. We stress that families are the breed of that culture.

European solidarity

Living standards and the economic starting position differ greatly in the individual European countries. The present crisis might even aggravate those discrepancies. European institutions should draw inspiration from the new stance of interpersonal solidarity. We urge

¹ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_de

² http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200412_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html

them to bear the burdens that now arise jointly and in solidarity. The EU now needs a new and strong European Recovery Program that will effectively and sustainably boost consumption and demand and support the economy and societies of Europe while complying with ecological requirements. An ambitious multiannual budgetary framework should be its driving force. We explicitly see the digital and ecological transformation as essential elements of a possible recovery of the EU. By no means should the initially planned European “Green deal” objectives be softened. In doing so, we must ensure a rapid return to the fundamental freedoms of the internal market, which are evident, for example, in the open borders.

In the present situation, in addition to achievements of European integration such as freedom of travel, fundamental rights are also being temporarily restricted. These measures must remain temporarily limited. They must be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are necessary and appropriate. Especially in a crisis, it is important to obtain reliable news and not to restrict the right to freedom of expression. Fundamental rights must also be made to function properly in times of crisis and guarantee the functioning of democratic structures.

Worldwide solidarity

Europe’s *raison d’être* is not just in itself. Our solidarity can be seen in providing better prospects for people around the world. In many parts of the world, people are existentially threatened by the virus, but also by other situations such as poverty, hunger and increasing natural disasters. They need framework conditions to enable sustainable development in their home countries. Europe is called upon to do this, among other things by guaranteeing them fair trading conditions and the foundations of a just economy. We support a debt moratorium preventing the new debt trap into which the countries of the South are falling through no fault of their own as a result of the economic crisis.

Europe's responsibility also applies to the people on our external borders. We are ready to welcome refugees, especially vulnerable children and their families, and young people. We urge the European Commission to issue a new pact for migration and asylum based on real solidarity with the Countries of first entry.

Personal attention in a future of solidarity

We are learning from the crisis that global action is just as possible as individual changes in behaviour. These changes must be embedded in a good institutional framework. From this we draw the strength for an ecological transformation and a different kind of globalization that does not only meet European needs. The preservation of creation and the preservation of the common sphere of life are not in conflict with economic interests. On the contrary, we believe, inspired by *Laudato Si'*, that all can work together in the spirit of Christian social teaching to ensure that respect for and protection of every human being – especially poor people - and the promotion of the common good have both their right and their necessity.