

## **Message from President Juncker to Holy Convent of Assisi, 27 October 2016**

I am grateful for the opportunity to address your conference, which marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first meeting between John Paul II and other world Religious Leaders to underline the commitment of Religion to Peace.

This meeting comes at an important time for Europe and for the world. In the State of Union speech that I have delivered before the European Parliament on 14 September, I have called it an existential crisis. I believe that our belief in the value of the process of European integration is challenged today. As I said in my speech, never before have I seen so much fragmentation, and so little commonality in our Union.

In the face of this, we need to find reasons for hope, we need to recall the fundamentals on which the European Union is built. Europe is more than a set of political institutions or an economic option. The community method and the balance between supranational institutions and between them and the Member States reflect the choice for dialogue and cooperation over the use of force, for solidarity, for the common good over the short-term interest, for mutual respect of different identities, culture and beliefs.

We need to protect what Europe is about and all that has been achieved during the last 60 years of common work together. We need to protect our common heritage of fundamental values, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

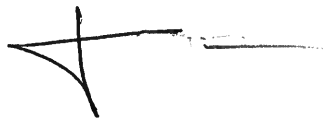
To do that, we need to deliver on a positive agenda of initiatives, coherent with our values and the spirit of the Union.

That is why the European Commission, amongs other things, is committed to advance a European Agenda for migration, reflecting our common principles of solidarity and responsibility. The recent refugee crisis has shown what Europe can do, together, when it is capable of solidarity, but also what is happening when such solidarity is lacking. Solidarity must be given voluntarily, it cannot be forced, but it must be supported and promoted. In this perspective we have proposed a reform of the Common European Asylum System, we are working on integration of asylum seekers in our societies and and we have launched an ambitious partnership on migration with third countries, backed by an investment plan for Africa and the neighbourhood. We need an investment offensive to promote the development of partner countries and address the root causes of migration and displacement. Solidarity cannot stop at European borders. By the end of the year, the Commission will also present a European Solidarity Corps, to provide a framework allowing young Europeans to volunteer their help when needed most, responding to crisis situations and showing solidarity in action.

The European Union should also not forget its responsibility for fighting poverty, building a fairer global trade system and defending peace on the global stage, starting from making a renewed effort to bring to an end the atrocities in Syria and promote a negotiating process for a political transition in the country.

I believe that religious actors can play an important role when it comes to addressing the current challenges facing Europe. This task cannot be left to those working in the political institutions alone. In this perspective, the European Union has established a regular dialogue with religious organisations and we greatly value your contribution to our work. In this perspective, we have dedicated the upcoming high-level meeting between the European Commission and religious organisations of 29 November 2016 to discuss the issues of migration, integration and European values.

In closing I would like to extend to you and to all the participants my most sincere wishes for a successful meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive letter 'A' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.