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Intergenerational Solidarity Said to Deserves Full EU Support

Summit of Faith Leaders and EU Institutions Aims to Overcome Demographic Crisis

BRUSSELS, JULY 18, 2012 (Zenit.org).- Intergenerational Solidarity was at the heart of this year's annual summit meeting of European Faith leaders with the Presidents of EU Institutions. This was the eighth such high-level meeting, and took place at the invitation of President José Manuel Barroso and was co-chaired by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council and László Surján, Vice-President of the European Parliament.

One of the expressions of the European Commission's dialogue with churches and religious communities is the annual high-level meeting with religious leaders.

This year, the EU Commission dedicated the high level meeting to 'Intergenerational Solidarity: Setting the Parameters for Tomorrow's Society in Europe,' as 2012 marks the 'European year for active aging and solidarity between generations'. The COMECE Bishops also dedicated their Spring Plenary Assembly this year to this topic and underlined that generations cannot live only for themselves but they have to rely on each other.

To face the critical demographic crisis in Europe, Archbishop André-Joseph Leonard of Malines-Brussels suggested in today's meeting that among the different options -- besides the reform of pension schemes and immigration -- the reinforcement of families, especially stable families, is the only sustainable way out of the crisis. This implies courageous steps in the field of fiscal policy, financial support for the third or fourth child, social measures fostering work-family life balance.

In this context, Bishop Gianni Ambrosio of Piacenza-Bobbio, Italy and COMECE Vice-President, emphasized the necessity for Europe and its Member States to preserve the Sunday as a common weekly day of rest. "Especially for the family, for the spiritual life of its members and for human relations, both inside the family and with relatives and friends, the common Sunday rest is of fundamental importance," he said. He recalled that churches together with major trade unions and civil society organizations have joined forces to protect a work-free Sunday in EU and in Member States' legislation.

Referring to the dramatic situation of unemployment in Spain, Bishop Adolfo González-Montes of Almería, Spain and COMECE delegate denounced the "irresponsible and immoral political practices in Spain that led to sacrificing the younger generation" which is now hit by a 50% unemployment rate. He called on the EU to foster sound and truly effective measures to fight youth unemployment, and stressed the supporting role of EU funds, including the contribution of the EU in the area of youth policies.

In Romania, as in many Eastern European countries, families are challenged by the fact that one or both parents have to travel to work in Western Europe in order to support their families back home, explained Bishop Virgil Bercea, COMECE Vice-President. "This is causing many families to fall apart and children to grow up without one or both parents, which will create other problems for European society in the long run." He called on the EU institutions to create specific mechanisms for countries such as Romania that will help them develop faster economically so they can provide opportunities for their own citizens. "These mechanisms should include transparency in how the public money is spent, guarantees for an independent justice system, eradication of corruption, protection of human rights and religious freedom," he said.

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