

Pope Francis: address to EU Heads of State and Government



(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis

addressed Heads of State and Heads of Government of European Union countries on Friday afternoon, the eve of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the treaties creating the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community – the first major structural steps toward creating the European Union.

Below, please find the full text of the Holy Father's prepared remarks, in their official English translation

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to European Heads of State and Government 24 March 2017

Distinguished Guests,

I thank you for your presence here tonight, on the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaties instituting the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. I convey to each of you the affection of the Holy See for your respective countries and for Europe itself, to whose future it is, in God's providence, inseparably linked. I am particularly grateful to the Honourable Paolo Gentiloni, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Italy, for his respectful words of greeting in your name and for the efforts that Italy has made in preparing for this meeting. I also thank the Honourable Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament, who has voiced the aspirations of the peoples of the Union on this anniversary.

Returning to Rome, sixty years later, must not simply be a remembrance of things past, but the expression of a desire to relive that event in order to appreciate its significance for the present. We need to immerse ourselves in the challenges of that time, so as to face those of today and tomorrow. The Bible, with its rich historical narratives, can teach us a basic lesson. We cannot understand our own times apart from the past, seen not as an assemblage of distant facts, but as the lymph that gives life to the present. Without such an awareness, reality loses its unity, history loses its logical thread, and humanity loses a sense of the meaning of its activity and its progress towards the future.

25 March 1957 was a day full of hope and expectation, enthusiasm and apprehension. Only an event of exceptional significance and historical consequences could make it unique in history. The memory of that day is linked to today's hopes and the expectations of the people of Europe, who call for discernment in the present, so that the journey that has begun can continue with renewed enthusiasm and confidence.

This was very clear to the founding fathers and the leaders who, by signing the two Treaties, gave life to that political, economic, cultural and primarily human reality which today we call the European Union. As P.H. Spaak, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs stated, it was a matter “indeed, of the material prosperity of our peoples, the expansion of our economies, social progress and completely new industrial and commercial possibilities, but above all... a particular conception of life that is humane, fraternal and just”.^[1]

After the dark years and the bloodshed of the Second World War, the leaders of the time had faith in the possibility of a better future. “They did not lack boldness, nor did they act too late. The memory of recent tragedies and failures seems to have inspired them and given them the courage needed to leave behind their old disputes and to think and act in a truly new way, in order to bring about the greatest transformation... of Europe”.^[2]

The founding fathers remind us that Europe is not a conglomeration of rules to obey, or a manual of protocols and procedures to follow. It is a way of life, a way of understanding man based on his transcendent and inalienable dignity, as something more than simply a sum of rights to defend or claims to advance. At the origin of the idea of Europe, we find “the nature and the responsibility of the human person, with his ferment of evangelical fraternity..., with his desire for truth and justice, honed by a thousand-year-old experience”.^[3] Rome, with its vocation to universality,^[4] symbolizes that experience and was thus chosen as the place for the signing of the Treaties. For here – as the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. Luns, observed – “were laid the political, juridical and social foundations of our civilization”.^[5]

It was clear, then, from the outset, that the heart of the European political project could only be man himself. It was also clear that the Treaties could remain a dead letter; they needed to take on spirit and life. The first element of European vitality must be solidarity. As the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, J. Bech stated, “the European economic community will prove lasting and successful only if it remains constantly faithful to the spirit of European solidarity that created it, and if the common will of the Europe now being born proves more powerful than the will of individual nations”.[6] That spirit remains as necessary as ever today, in the face of centrifugal impulses and the temptation to reduce the founding ideals of the Union to productive, economic and financial needs.

Solidarity gives rise to openness towards others. “Our plans are not inspired by self-interest”,[7] said the German Chancellor, K. Adenauer. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, C. Pineau, echoed this sentiment: “Surely the countries about to unite... do not have the intention of isolating themselves from the rest of the world and surrounding themselves with insurmountable barriers”.[8] In a world that was all too familiar with the tragedy of walls and divisions, it was clearly important to work for a united and open Europe, and for the removal of the unnatural barrier that divided the continent from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic. What efforts were made to tear down that wall! Yet today the memory of those efforts has been lost. Forgotten too is the tragedy of separated families, poverty and destitution born of that division. Where generations longed to see the fall of those signs of forced hostility, these days we debate how to keep out the “dangers” of our time: beginning with the long file of women, men and children fleeing war and poverty, seeking only a future for themselves and their loved ones.

In today’s lapse of memory, we often forget another great achievement of the solidarity ratified on 25 March 1957: the longest period of peace experienced in recent centuries. “Peoples who over time often found themselves in opposed camps, fighting with one another... now find themselves united and enriched by their distinctive national identities”.[9] Peace is always the fruit of a free and conscious contribution by all. Nonetheless, “for many people today, peace appears as a blessing to be taken for granted”,[10] one that can then easily come to be regarded as superfluous. On the contrary, peace is a precious and essential good, for without it, we cannot build a future for anyone, and we end up “living from day to day”.

United Europe was born of a clear, well-defined and carefully pondered project, however embryonic at first. Every worthy project looks to the future, and the future are the young, who are called to realize its hopes and promises.[11] The founding fathers had a clear sense of being part of a common effort that not only crossed national borders, but also the borders of time, so as to bind generations among themselves, all sharing equally in the building of the common home.

Distinguished Guests,

I have devoted this first part of my talk to the founding fathers of Europe, so that we can be challenged by their words, the timeliness of their thinking, their impassioned pursuit of the common good, their certainty of sharing in a work greater than themselves, and the breadth of the ideals that inspired them.

Their common denominator was the spirit of service, joined to passion for politics and the consciousness that “at the origin of European civilization there is Christianity”,^[12] without which the Western values of dignity, freedom and justice would prove largely incomprehensible. As Saint John Paul II affirmed: “Today too, the soul of Europe remains united, because, in addition to its common origins, those same Christian and human values are still alive. Respect for the dignity of the human person, a profound sense of justice, freedom, industriousness, the spirit of initiative, love of family, respect for life, tolerance, the desire for cooperation and peace: all these are its distinctive marks”.^[13]

In our multicultural world, these values will continue to have their rightful place provided they maintain a vital connection to their deepest roots. The fruitfulness of that connection will make it possible to build authentically “lay” societies, free of ideological conflicts, with equal room for the native and the immigrant, for believers and nonbelievers.

The world has changed greatly in the last sixty years. If the founding fathers, after surviving a devastating conflict, were inspired by the hope of a better future and were determined to pursue it by avoiding the rise of new conflicts, our time is dominated more by the concept of crisis. There is the economic crisis that has marked the past decade; there is the crisis of the family and of established social models; there is a widespread “crisis of institutions” and the migration crisis. So many crises that engender fear and profound confusion in our contemporaries, who look for a new way of envisioning the future. Yet the term “crisis” is not necessarily negative. It does not simply indicate a painful moment to be endured. The word “crisis” has its origin in the Greek verb *kríno*, which means to discern, to weigh, to assess. Ours is a time of discernment, one that invites us to determine what is essential and to build on it. It is a time of challenge and opportunity.

So what is the interpretative key for reading the difficulties of the present and finding answers for the future? Returning to the thinking of the founding Fathers would be fruitless unless it could help to point out a path and provide an incentive for facing the future and a source of hope. When a body loses its sense of direction and is no longer able to look ahead, it experiences a regression and, in the long run, risks dying. What, then, is the legacy of the founding fathers? What prospects do they indicate for surmounting the challenges that lie before us? What hope do they offer for the Europe of today and of tomorrow?

Their answers are to be found precisely in the pillars on which they determined to build the European economic community. I have already mentioned these: the centrality of man, effective solidarity,

openness to the world, the pursuit of peace and development, openness to the future. Those who govern are charged with discerning the paths of hope, identifying specific ways forward to ensure that the significant steps taken thus far have not been wasted, but serve as the pledge of a long and fruitful journey.

Europe finds new hope when man is the centre and the heart of her institutions. I am convinced that this entails an attentive and trust-filled readiness to hear the expectations voiced by individuals, society and the peoples who make up the Union. Sadly, one frequently has the sense that there is a growing “split” between the citizenry and the European institutions, which are often perceived as distant and inattentive to the different sensibilities present in the Union. Affirming the centrality of man also means recovering the spirit of family, whereby each contributes freely to the common home in accordance with his or her own abilities and gifts. It helps to keep in mind that Europe is a family of peoples[14] and that – as in every good family – there are different sensitivities, yet all can grow to the extent that all are united. The European Union was born as a unity of differences and a unity in differences. What is distinctive should not be a reason for fear, nor should it be thought that unity is preserved by uniformity. Unity is instead harmony within a community. The founding fathers chose that very term as the hallmark of the agencies born of the Treaties and they stressed that the resources and talents of each were now being pooled. Today the European Union needs to recover the sense of being primarily a “community” of persons and peoples, to realize that “the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts”,[15] and that therefore “we constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all”.[16] The founding fathers sought that harmony in which the whole is present in every one of the parts, and the parts are – each in its own unique way – present in the whole.

Europe finds new hope in solidarity, which is also the most effective antidote to modern forms of populism. Solidarity entails the awareness of being part of a single body, while at the same time involving a capacity on the part of each member to “sympathize” with others and with the whole. When one suffers, all suffer (cf. 1 Cor 12:26). Today, with the United Kingdom, we mourn the victims of the attack that took place in London two days ago. For solidarity is no mere ideal; it is expressed in concrete actions and steps that draw us closer to our neighbours, in whatever situation they find themselves. Forms of populism are instead the fruit of an egotism that hems people in and prevents them from overcoming and “looking beyond” their own narrow vision. There is a need to start thinking once again as Europeans, so as to avert the opposite dangers of a dreary uniformity or the triumph of particularisms. Politics needs this kind of leadership, which avoids appealing to emotions to gain consent, but instead, in a spirit of solidarity and subsidiarity, devises policies that can make the Union as a whole develop harmoniously. As a result, those who run faster can offer a hand to those who are slower, and those who find the going harder can aim at catching up to those at the head of the line.

Europe finds new hope when she refuses to yield to fear or close herself off in false forms of security.

Quite the contrary, her history has been greatly determined by encounters with other peoples and cultures; hers “is, and always has been, a dynamic and multicultural identity”.[17] The world looks to the European project with great interest. This was the case from the first day, when crowds gathered in Rome’s Capitol Square and messages of congratulation poured in from other states. It is even more the case today, if we think of those countries that have asked to become part of the Union and those states that receive the aid so generously offered them for battling the effects of poverty, disease and war. Openness to the world implies the capacity for “dialogue as a form of encounter”[18] on all levels, beginning with dialogue between member states, between institutions and citizens, and with the numerous immigrants landing on the shores of the Union. It is not enough to handle the grave crisis of immigration of recent years as if it were a mere numerical or economic problem, or a question of security. The immigration issue poses a deeper question, one that is primarily cultural. What kind of culture does Europe propose today? The fearfulness that is becoming more and more evident has its root cause in the loss of ideals. Without an approach inspired by those ideals, we end up dominated by the fear that others will wrench us from our usual habits, deprive us of familiar comforts, and somehow call into question a lifestyle that all too often consists of material prosperity alone. Yet the richness of Europe has always been her spiritual openness and her capacity to raise basic questions about the meaning of life. Openness to the sense of the eternal has also gone hand in hand, albeit not without tensions and errors, with a positive openness to this world. Yet today’s prosperity seems to have clipped the continent’s wings and lowered its gaze. Europe has a patrimony of ideals and spiritual values unique in the world, one that deserves to be proposed once more with passion and renewed vigour, for it is the best antidote against the vacuum of values of our time, which provides a fertile terrain for every form of extremism. These are the ideals that shaped Europe, that “Peninsula of Asia” which stretches from the Urals to the Atlantic.

Europe finds new hope when she invests in development and in peace. Development is not the result of a combination of various systems of production. It has to do with the whole human being: the dignity of labour, decent living conditions, access to education and necessary medical care.

“Development is the new name of peace”,[19] said Pope Paul VI, for there is no true peace whenever people are cast aside or forced to live in dire poverty. There is no peace without employment and the prospect of earning a dignified wage. There is no peace in the peripheries of our cities, with their rampant drug abuse and violence.

Europe finds new hope when she is open to the future. When she is open to young people, offering them serious prospects for education and real possibilities for entering the work force. When she invests in the family, which is the first and fundamental cell of society. When she respects the consciences and the ideals of her citizens. When she makes it possible to have children without the fear of being unable to support them. When she defends life in all its sacredness.

Distinguished Guests,

Nowadays, with the general increase in people's life span, sixty is considered the age of full maturity, a critical time when we are once again called to self-examination. The European Union, too, is called today to examine itself, to care for the ailments that inevitably come with age, and to find new ways to steer its course. Yet unlike human beings, the European Union does not face an inevitable old age, but the possibility of a new youthfulness. Its success will depend on its readiness to work together once again, and by its willingness to wager on the future. As leaders, you are called to blaze the path of a "new European humanism"[20] made up of ideals and concrete actions. This will mean being unafraid to take practical decisions capable of meeting people's real problems and of standing the test of time.

For my part, I readily assure you of the closeness of the Holy See and the Church to Europe as a whole, to whose growth she has, and always will, continue to contribute. Invoking upon Europe the Lord's blessings, I ask him to protect her and grant her peace and progress. I make my own the words that Joseph Bech proclaimed on Rome's Capitoline Hill: *Ceterum censeo Europam esse aedificandam* – furthermore, I believe that Europe ought to be built.

Thank you.

[1] P.H. SPAAK, Address on the Signing of the Treaties of Rome, 25 March 1957.

[2] Ibid.

[3] A. DE GASPERI. La nostra patria Europa. Address to the European Parliamentary Conference, 21 April 1954, in Alcide De Gasperi e la politica internazionale, Cinque Lune, Rome, 1990, vol. III, 437-440.

[4] Cf. P.H. SPAAK, loc. cit.

[5] J. LUNS, Address on the Signing of the Treaties of Rome, 25 March 1957.

[6] J. BECH, Address on the Signing of the Treaties of Rome, 25 March 1957.

[7] K. ADENAUER, Address on the Signing of the Treaties of Rome, 25 March 1957.

[8] C. PINEAU, Address on the Signing of the Treaties of Rome, 25 March 1957.

[9] P.H. SPAAK, loc. cit.

[10] Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2017.

[11] Cf. P.H. SPAAK, loc. cit.

[12] A. DE GASPERI, loc. cit.

[13] JOHN PAUL II, European Act, Santiago de Compostela, 9 November 1982: AAS 75/1 (1983), 329.

[14] Cf. Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014: AAS 106 (2014), 1000.

[15] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 235.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Address at the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, 6 May 2016: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6-7 May 2016, p. 4.

[18] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 239.

[19] PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 26 March 1967, 87: AAS 59 (1967), 299.

[20] Address at the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize, loc. cit., p. 5.

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