

Welcome word by Mr Herman VAN ROMPUY,
President of the Administrative Council of the College
of Europe

College of Europe, Bruges

11 November 2019

I welcome His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It is an exceptional honour to have you here with us today and to be able to listen to your words.

The European Union was created in response to the non-values of the war years of last century in Europe. In a sense, peace is a value in itself. Peace is the basis of the Union. Economic and monetary unification is at the service of this humanist ideal. War is man's negation. In the last 70 years there have been wars on the European continent, but not in the European Union. But we must remain vigilant and remember what President Mitterrand once said: 'nationalism means war'. I do not mean the pride in one's own language and culture, but the idea that the other is an opponent, an enemy, even inferior. Nationalism is once again gaining ground in the world. I sometimes speak of the 'globalisation of nationalism'.

We must continue to see the human being as a sacred. For Christians, every person is inscribed in the palm of God's hand; for those who have a different conviction, all our efforts must be aimed at promoting human dignity. For every human being, for his neighbor as well as for the foreigner. The Good Samaritan who nursed an enemy is a parable that can be shared by every humanist, Christian and other, as the culmination of what it means to be human.

Whoever loves man, loves all people. That is what we call solidarity. The European anthem takes over Beethoven's words: 'All men will be brothers'. Solidarity requires an effort, a surpassing, transcending the Ego and the national Ego. The European Union stands or falls by solidarity. Unfortunately, it is under pressure today. Today, we are lacking solidarity with the most vulnerable among us, who are war refugees already living on our territory and with those who feel abandoned by the ruthlessness of our competitive model. No macro project can be sustained without micro empathy and love.

We must show the same solidarity with future generations when it comes to the climate, to our planet. The planet itself only means something because it is about people. It is a matter of 'life and death'. We

are on the side of life, on the side of love, on the side of the other .

The Orthodox Church makes a major contribution to European unification. Orthodox believers play a crucial role in four EU countries, but also elsewhere. With the enlargement of the Union, the three major currents of Christianity have now been represented in the Union. In the east of our continent, the Union has strong ties with three countries through association agreements, deeply imbued with Orthodox culture. The Union has several spiritual and philosophical sources, all of which contribute to its specificity and to its unique role in the world. We not only have interests to defend, but also ideas and ideals to promote. The latter are deeply permeated by the humanist message: every human being counts. We are well aware that we have to uphold these ideals in the midst of a growing climate of intolerance, fanaticism and extremism, folding back on itself. We need defenders and lawyers of the 'Europe of values'.

That is why you are so welcome in Bruges, one of the cities in which the European idea was born and of which we are still the proud heirs.