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A NEW MISSION FOR EUROPE

International Meeting of the Friends of “Together for Europe” (*TfE*) in Porto, Portugal

From the 11th till the 13th November 2022, the Friends of *TfE* gathered in Porto, Portugal, for their annual exchange of lived-out experiences: participating were 166 European citizens coming from 19 Countries (including Ukraine and Russia). Those taking part belong to 45 different Christian Movements and Organizations, among which representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and the Free Churches. The national Portuguese committee warmly welcomed their many guests. Their repeated invitation was: “You’ll always be welcome in Porto”.

Through lived-out experiences and insights, the **younger generation** gave valid contributions to the discussion regarding the discernment of “a new vision for Europe”. “In 2010 I completed my degree in European Studies. I was full of idealism for a united Europe”. However, during the first years of his career in the European Institutions, Frans Verkaart (Focolare, the Netherlands) experienced something quite different. “Today I can say: building Europe does not mean having an idyllic idea of unity; it means facing imperfections, accepting them and allowing them to challenge me. Instead of imposing my vision upon the others, I can always try of respond with a Christian attitude that favours the growth of a new Europe”.

Frans referred to the European “power centres”, whereas Salomé Andrade and her friends (Schoenstatt Movement, Portugal) spoke about the “existential peripheries”. They came in contact with *TfE* 10 years ago, when still young children. Salomé affirmed: “*TfE* teaches us to look beyond our Movement. For example, in our city we opened a school of music; we also provide catechism lessons, and the contact with the others gives us the opportunity to radiate the light that we experience in community”.

João Manuel Duque, the rector of UCP *Universidade Católica Portuguesa*, (Braga); Victoria Martín de la Torre, journalist, (Brussels); e Sr. Nicole Grochowina, historian, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, (Germany), made up the panel to discuss “**Today’s Europe – challenges and opportunities**”. Sr Nicole is also a member of the Steering Committee of *TfE*. In their brief contributions, the panel members outlined the reality of a Christian community that accepts its role of being a new minority, and thus renouncing to power and numerical strength, and, at the same time, regains its true prophetic mission. This Christian community wants to offer to an ever more polarized society the spirit of reconciliation and peace in the sense of the “metanoia”, that is, by recognizing its own imperfection and the need of God’s mercy. After that, François Delooz (Community of St Egidio, Belgium) clearly and explicitly stated to which Europe *TfE* says ‘Yes’.

The Meeting was characterized by profound **spiritual moments**. By solemnly renewing their “Pact of mutual love” (Jn 13, 34) at the beginning of the Meeting, the participants once again promised to “keep on journeying together, with full trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us”. Gerhard Pross (YMCA Esslingen, Germany), Gérard Testard (Efesia, France) and others offered profound spiritual inputs. In the evening, the participants gathered for a “Prayer for peace” that was organized by a group of Portuguese young people. Dom Manuel Linda, the Catholic bishop of Porto, together with several clergy of the Lusitanian, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches took part. “We want the city to see us as a praying community”. This, indeed, was what many of those involved wanted.

Concluding, Gerhard Pross invited his listeners to “**enter into the split**”, that is, to endure the tensions that often threaten to tear apart Europe, the Churches and even the communities themselves. Through their contributions, the participants from Russia and Ukraine gave a clear explanation what shape this split can have. Diego Goller (Focolare, Rome), member of the Steering Committee, addressing them, stated: “Thanks to your presence here with us, *TfE* has entered deeply into that split”.

Other appointments for 2023

After this immersion in the South-Western European reality, 2023 will be dedicated to Eastern Europe.

Timisoara, in Romania, one of the three European Capitals of Culture in 2023, is willing to open its doors to *TfE* on two occasions. **May 1-7, 2023**: young people in Romania are inviting other young people for a youth meeting, and then on **16-18 November, 2023**, the city will welcome the enlarged group of Friends of *TfE*. Save the date!

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