



Report of the President

With a grateful feeling I look back on the work the member organisations and the secretariat in Brussels have done and continue doing. I trust that each unit: advocacy, humanitarian action, institutional development and communication are implementing and reporting on their activities. It is a pleasure to see new initiatives coming up and growing. This is how we can look at a Region, our European Region, which demonstrates dynamism and follows very closely what happens to people and societies in the different countries. Through the communication we receive from the secretariat we know how attention is given to the situations of poverty and suffering in our own continent and in the world at large. These issues concern me in a particular way: what happens nowadays in society and how does Caritas respond to all this?

A major concern is how society is getting more and more polarised, often reacting to the phenomenon of migration and refugees. Social discussions and political concerns seem to find it difficult to arrive at acceptable solutions through dialogue. In the run-up to the European and national elections, we notice how difficult it is to focus on the common good of everyone, to respect the person behind the category 'refugee', to respect people with a different cultural or religious background. We see how different political parties forget the inherent dignity of the person, especially those from the opposition, when confronting ideas and ideologies. Sometimes I think politicians and representatives of unions like to use war language more than trying to enter into dialogue with their counterparts. The recent talks between North Korea and the US show that great efforts are made to come together to find agreement, but at the first difficulty dialogue breaks apart.

Caritas wants to build bridges, to create and sustain links with organisations within and outside of a specific Caritas context. To that end, all member organisations should continuously reflect on the signs of the times, especially with regard to the treatment of the poor and the newcomers in our European societies. In order to do this from the Christian point of view, Caritas Europa's main concern is the constant effort to form our collaborators and volunteers in the different. We are very happy to see that more and more 'Young Caritas' members are joining the ranks, giving a fresh impetus and showing an open mind to all. To work for the common good of all people, we need strong links between the different sectors in our field. The Senior Management Team in the secretariat looks after networking with other organisations: the Council of Europe, the European Commission and Parliament, CCEE, COMECE, Social Platform, Social Services Europe, Voice, Concord, the Christian Group on Migration, etc. A broad network of partners and alliances allows Caritas to enter into dialogue with others, in order to learn from them and to communicate our experience of encounter, the voice of the "voiceless", our philosophy and the Christian identity to others. The image of the Good Samaritan who helps the suffering man along the road inspires us constantly on our way to the realisation of the love of God for all men.

Caritas is and will continue working to create the necessary balance between nations, between the powerful and the poor, between all sectors of society and the Church, between governments and the people, between people of different cultural and religious backgrounds and the local people, between religions and philosophical convictions. Standing at the frontline of European society, Caritas is guided in its reflections and positioning by the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church; the different situations in several Eastern European countries like Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Balkans, but also issues like Brexit, the tensions in Spain and Catalonia, Hungary, and many more situations all over Europe that create concern and demand for discernment. We need and want to

form a sound opinion on the ‘gilets jaunes’ in France, on the manifestations for a climate policies by the young students and on the demonstrations for the right to fair wages of the working population. The conflicts in the Middle East, the many sufferings in Africa, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere also impell our Samaritan heart to understand and act in solidarity with our sister Caritas. These and other concerns frame the concrete advocacy efforts on social policies, migration, development and humanitarian action; they are the objective of formation, of animation among members and volunteers as well as in our contacts with other political, social and ecclesial organisations. We also notice a growing common path among the different regions of Caritas so that the link with ‘Caritas Internationalis’ becomes ever more real and fruitful.

Some reflections from the President regarding the four years mandate 2015-2019

This period was particularly marked by two major crises: the war in Ukraine and the solidarity crisis of 2015, when many refugees knocked at Europe’s door. On the one hand, this has created opportunities to learn from each other and to work together with other agencies as well as among caritas organisations in different countries. We are grateful to Pope Francis who gave us the 20 action points to share with European governments in order to establish good collaboration to welcome, protect, promote and integrate refugees - young and old, healthy and ill - into our societies. At the same time, we notice reluctance among many people to open up the borders and their hearts for people with a different cultural and religious background. This is a reality which offers our Caritas members the opportunity to assist people and communities to broaden their minds, open their hearts and grow in a universal spirit.

In dialogue with Caritas Internationalis, some important clarifications were made regarding the strategic planning as well as at the level of international collaboration.

When working with representatives of the Church, we notice there is a need to clarify the aim and aspiration of Caritas. In some countries Caritas has not yet gained the attention of the local dioceses and parishes or organisations.

All of these realities are closely followed up by the secretariat under the guidance of the Secretary General with his Senior Management Team. During their daily work and regular ‘retreats’ they examine carefully the current affairs, reading the signes of the times. They look for tools and means for increasing the proper way of working and especially for putting the poor and the needy at the center of every plan and project.

I want to express my gratitude to all member organisations, their staff and leadership, to the very responsible and caring Executive Board, to all the action groups and task forces composed of so many experts from members, and to the active team of the secretariat in Brussels. These last four years would not have been a success without all of you joining forces to serve the poor and needy in Europe and the entire world.