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There is no Gospel without culture 2013 Meeting of the Eastern Rite Catholic Bishops

Košice, Slovakia, 17-20 October 2013

Even though not identifying itself with any culture, the Church is aware of the importance of dialogue with the cultures present in the European continent. It is impossible to think of the proclamation of Christ outside history. In fact, Christ's encounter with history gives rise to culture: the culture of life. These were the thoughts of the Eastern Rite Catholic bishops in Europe in drawing up a final message at the end of their annual meeting.

For four days (17-20 October 2013), about thirty European Eastern Rite Catholic bishops met in Košice (Slovakia), European Capital of Culture 2013, at the invitation of **Mgr Milan Chatur C.SS.R.**, Bishop (Eparch in the Eastern tradition) of Košice.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of the Year of Faith and the commemoration of the 1150th anniversary of the arrival of the brother Saints Cyril and Methodius in Slav territory. In Košice, the participants examined the ways in which the Gospel today makes culture. There were addresses from **Cardinal Jozef Tomko**, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples; **Archbishop Cyril Vasil'**, Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches; the Apostolic Exarch for Byzantine Rite Catholics in Greece, **Mgr Dimitrios Salachas**; and from **Fr Juraj Dufka SJ** from Košice's East-West Centre of spirituality, who gave a reflection on *Art as a tool of evangelisation*.

The Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) encompasses the current 33 European Bishops' Conferences, represented by their Presidents, the Archbishops of Luxembourg, of the Principality of Monaco, the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus and the Bishop of Chişinău (Moldova Rep.), the Eparchial Bishop of Mukachevo and the Apostolic Administrator of Estonia. The current President is Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Primate of Hungary; the Vice-Presidents are Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa, and Mgr Józef Michalik, Archbishop of Przemyśl (Poland). The General Secretary is Mgr Duarte da Cunha. The Secretariat is based at St Gallen (Switzerland). www.ccee.eu

In the course of the meeting, and especially within the context of the Year of Faith, the bishops wanted to make together their profession of faith by reciting communally the profession of faith which Blessed John Paul II included in *Slavorum Apostoli*.

During the meeting, the participants were received by the Latin Rite Bishop of Kosice, **Mgr Bernard Bober**, they met the Mayor of the city and visited the **Exhibition of Byzantine Art** displayed in Košice's Theology Faculty.

The meeting took place in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, enriched by moments of prayer and the daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The liturgy, always carefully prepared and with great participation, ensured that the words exchanged in the meeting were also an expression of a lived experience.

The 2014 meeting will take place in Lviv, in the Ukraine, from 23-26 October, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the legalisation of the Greek-Catholic Church in the Ukraine.-

Message from Europe's Eastern Catholic bishops

The Eastern Catholic bishops of Europe, gathered for their annual meeting under the patronage of CCEE, in the city of Košice, European Capital of Culture 2013, at the invitation of the local Greek-Catholic Eparch, on the joyful celebration of the 1150th anniversary of the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius among the Slav peoples, examined the theme of the evangelisation of culture, with a re-reading, too, of the evangelising mission of the two Greek brother saints, bearing in mind the challenges which their Churches in Europe must face at the local level. At the end of their meeting, the bishops wish to address their faithful and all people of goodwill with this message of hope, charity and love.

Once again we come to affirm and recall the Christian roots of Europe, profoundly convinced of the topicality of the message of Saints Cyril and Methodius. A civilisation and a European culture, where the salvific gospel of Christ has been uprooted, will be unable to build a robust human society, founded on ethical, moral values and on the family which guarantees justice and peace between peoples. A Godless culture leads the human person to desperation and death. We advocate a culture of life and hope: a culture capable of embracing the human person in all their aspects and creating fraternity, love, friendship and solidarity, especially towards the poor, the emigrant and the abandoned. A culture worthy of the name is that which includes worship of God, a God who loves humanity, every person for who He has given his life and has overcome death by his glorious resurrection.

We are well aware of the problems of our peoples, the crisis sweeping across the European continent and the world, terrorism and the various armed conflicts, the political struggles and racism. The crisis is not just economic, but above all spiritual. We Christians, in our identity as Eastern Catholics, are called to be more authentic witnesses of the rich heritage of our fathers verified by the martyrdom of so many of our pastors and brothers.

We want to proclaim the Good News of God's Love for everyone with joy and enthusiasm. We need God to re-discover the meaning of our existence on this earth. No one can carry their own cross alone, but only with God and with their brothers and sisters. So, we want to reaffirm that Christ is not distant from our affairs. He asks us to trust Him. In life's affairs we find in Him the rock on whom we can rely.

The living experience of the Risen Christ was the source from which sprang Christians' commitment to building European culture. Today, just like yesterday, we Eastern Catholic bishops of Europe, confirm our goodwill in collaborating to build a culture of encounter and dialogue based on truth, freedom, justice, respect and tolerance.

In the European context, our Eastern Catholic Church communities and every person of faith is called personally by Divine Providence to continue the evangelising mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, achieving the necessary internal renewal and systematic progress desired by the Second Vatican Council. In this way our rich traditions will not remain a monument to admire and recall, but a source of life to heal European culture which more and more is becoming secularised and de-Christianised.

During our meeting, we looked with apprehension at the dramatic situation of suffering of our Christian brothers and faithful in the Middle East, especially in Syria. United with the Holy Father and the local bishops, we pray that the path of dialogue might be embarked upon more decisively and that to prayer may be united political decisions based on justice and respect for the various religious communities leading to an immediate ceasefire, the abandonment of any form of violence and an end to arms shipments which feed the war in the country.

Through the intercession of the Mother of God and Saints Cyril and Methodius, we ask our Lord to send peace on all the people on the continent.