



Conference on the Future of Europe Perspectives from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Department for International Affairs

As the United Kingdom left the European Union at the start of 2020, the Standing Committee of COMECE affirmed that the local Church will “*remain an integral part of the Church in Europe.*” Furthermore, COMECE recognised the continued importance of close cooperation on a social and political level, stating: “*Even if the United Kingdom is no longer part of the EU, it will continue being part of Europe. We are all destined to live and work together in the full respect of everyone else’s choices and diversities. It is crucial, therefore, to maintain good relations with each other.*”¹

It is in this spirit that the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales offers the following contribution to the Church's engagement with the Conference on the Future of Europe. Our perspective on the UK's relations with the rest of Europe is not one of 'us and them', but of neighbours whose actions affect one another and whose futures are inextricably interlinked.

We have therefore considered some principal areas in which the EU and UK can work closely together in response to Pope Francis' call at the 2017 (Re)Thinking Europe Congress to put the human person at the centre of all we do;² namely welcoming refugees, promoting the global common good, and caring for our common home. While this is by no means an exhaustive vision for the UK's role in the future of Europe, we hope that this triple focus will be helpful to reflection on the Church's involvement in the important dialogue taking place during the months ahead.

Welcoming refugees

In his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2021, Pope Francis warns that: “*Our ‘we’, both in the wider world and within the Church, is crumbling and cracking due to myopic and aggressive forms of nationalism and radical individualism. And the highest price is being paid by those who most easily become viewed as others: foreigners, migrants, the marginalized, those living on the existential peripheries.*”³

During recent years, this has been borne out in a humanitarian crisis as refugees try to reach the UK from mainland Europe. The number of people making perilous journeys across the English Channel / la Manche has rapidly increased, from 1,800 in 2019, to 8,500 in 2020,⁴ and has already surpassed that in 2021.⁵ While these figures are comparatively small compared to other borders of the EU such as the Mediterranean,

¹ COMECE, *Statement of the COMECE Presidency on Brexit*, 1 February 2020
comece.eu/dl/qK0tJKKKONLJqx4KJK/Statement_20200201_-_Brexit_EN.pdf

² Pope Francis, *Address to the Commission Of The Bishops' Conferences of the European Community*, 28 October 2017
vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171028_conferenza-comece.html

³ Pope Francis, *Message for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 27 September 2021
vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20210503_world-migrants-day-2021.html

⁴ Migration Observatory, *Q&A: Migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats*, 2 July 2021
migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/qa-migrants-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats/

⁵ BBC, *More migrants cross English Channel in small boats*, 8 September 2021 bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-58473698

each one represents a human being made in the image of God. The frequency of people losing their lives is also increasing, including four members of a single family late last year.⁶

At the same time, people trapped in the North of France are being *“excluded from access to essential needs”* and *“humiliated in the depths of their being”*, in the words of a local Bishop.⁷ Since the destruction of the Jungle camp in 2016, thousands of people have continued to live in perilous conditions along the French coast: *“being forced to line up outside in the cold to eat, walking three kilometres to go to the toilet or take a shower; hiding personal effects in the woods; pitching tents in the mud, where they are only able to sleep for a short time before being moved on by police.”*⁸

Cooperation between France and the UK in response to this crisis has so far focussed almost exclusively on fortifying the border, including UK investment in law enforcement, technology, and security infrastructure across Northern France, as well as intelligence sharing between the authorities and proposals for joint sea patrols aimed at stopping boats.⁹ The French Government has appealed to the EU border agency FRONTEX to provide air surveillance in support of this *“fight against immigration”* across the channel.¹⁰ Recently tensions have arisen between the two countries over UK proposals to forcibly turn people back,¹¹ a move that UNHCR has warned could endanger lives and break international maritime law.¹²

Although these measures have sometimes been presented as humanitarian steps to combat trafficking, this portrayal has been widely discredited by experts in the field. The Santa Marta Group, which is at the forefront of the Church’s global efforts to fight trafficking, warned the UK Home Secretary that on the contrary: *“The introduction of new barriers to entering and seeking asylum in the UK risks pushing more people into the hands of traffickers. Across the world it has been consistently demonstrated that policies criminalising those seeking sanctuary and introducing new border security measures do not save lives but are simply a charter for trafficking.”*¹³

Cooperation between the Church in the UK and mainland Europe has taken a different focus, emphasising the sanctity of human life, rather than border security. This is summarised in the COMECE response to the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, which states: *“Particular attention should be paid to the humanitarian situation in EU’s maritime external borders; concretely, in the English Channel, the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean Sea, where a high number of people are making perilous and often deadly journeys to reach Europe and within Europe towards the UK. Any effort should be made to avoid that EU shores become vast cemeteries, increasing search and rescue operations with specific guiding criteria.”*¹⁴

⁶ Crux, *UK bishop calls for ‘meeting of minds’ on asylum after English Channel deaths*, 28 October 2020 cruxnow.com/church-in-uk-and-ireland/2020/10/uk-bishop-calls-for-meeting-of-minds-on-asylum-after-english-channel-deaths/

⁷ *Joint statement from Bishop Leborgne of Arras and Véronique Fayet, President of Secours Catholique*, 3 March 2021 secours-catholique.org/actualites/exiles-cessons-ce-deni-de-realite-et-creons-un-veritable-socle-humanitaire

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ BBC, *UK and France agree deal to tackle rise in Channel crossings*, 21 July 2021 [bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57909188](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57909188)

¹⁰ iNews, *Channel migrants: France calls on EU border agency Frontex to provide air surveillance of crossings*, 26 July 2021 [inews.co.uk/news/world/channel-migrants-france-eu-border-agency-frontex-air-surveillance-crossings-1121033](https://www.inews.co.uk/news/world/channel-migrants-france-eu-border-agency-frontex-air-surveillance-crossings-1121033)

¹¹ BBC, *Channel crossings: Migrant boats could be turned back in new UK move*, 10 September 2021 [bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58495948](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-58495948)

¹² UNHCR, *The Refugee Brief*, 10 September 2021 [unhcr.org/refugeebrief/latest-issues/](https://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/latest-issues/)

¹³ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, *Policies criminalising Asylum Seekers provide a ‘charter for trafficking,’ says Bishop*, 7 May 2021 [cbcew.org.uk/policies-criminalising-asylum-seekers-provide-a-charter-for-trafficking-says-bishop/](https://www.cbcew.org.uk/policies-criminalising-asylum-seekers-provide-a-charter-for-trafficking-says-bishop/)

¹⁴ *Statement by the COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed by the European Commission*, 15 December 2020 [comece.eu/dl/uLnoJKJKkKOMJqx4kJK/2020-12-15_EN_Statement_EU_Pact_on_Migration.pdf](https://www.comece.eu/dl/uLnoJKJKkKOMJqx4kJK/2020-12-15_EN_Statement_EU_Pact_on_Migration.pdf)

COMECE's message has been affirmed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, with our Lead Bishop for Migrants and Refugees stating: *"The Governments of the UK and France need to work together to assist those struggling, recognising that they are dealing with people who have already escaped persecution and danger in their own countries."*¹⁵

Bishops from the UK have travelled to be physically present with the French Church and its humanitarian agencies in their mission to support refugees along the coast. They have emphasised the joint responsibility of European governments to: *"establish facilities that will allow migrants to raise their asylum claims from mainland Europe, create safe legal channels, and develop infrastructures to enable dignified living."*¹⁶ Earlier this year Catholic and Anglican Bishops on both sides of the Channel also stressed the importance of public action, urging their own communities *"to create a climate of welcome and understanding for strangers who share in the hopes and needs of all humanity."*¹⁷

The Conference on the Future of Europe provides an opportunity to raise our voices and support a reorientation of EU-UK cooperation away from strengthening border security, towards protecting the human person. Such an approach also necessitates our countries addressing the driving factors of displacement: *"determining why so many choose to flee their home country and using their influence to eradicate the underlying reasons why these same people are willing to risk their lives in the open sea."*¹⁸ These themes are explored further in the following section.

Promoting the global common good

The Church teaches that all human beings are sisters and brothers, part of one global family that stretches beyond any national or continental borders. We therefore welcome the opportunity, as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe, to explore the role that Europe can play in the wider international community.

We also recognise that there are many opportunities for the EU, UK, and other neighbours to work closely together in their approach. Three specific examples are (i) using international trade to promote the global common good (ii) controlling arms sales which fuel conflict around the world (iii) providing humanitarian aid to the poorest communities.

Trade

Addressing the International Labour Organisation earlier this year, Pope Francis warned: *"In our haste to return to greater economic activity, at the end of the Covid-19 threat, let us avoid the past fixations on profit, isolation and nationalism, blind consumerism and denial of the clear evidence that signals discrimination against our "throwaway" brothers and sisters in our society."*¹⁹ These are significant

¹⁵ Tablet, *Christians must side with refugees in Channel row, says bishop*, 12 August 2020

[thetablet.co.uk/news/13252/christians-must-side-with-refugees-in-channel-row-says-bishop](https://www.tablet.co.uk/news/13252/christians-must-side-with-refugees-in-channel-row-says-bishop)

¹⁶ Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Bishops call on UK Government to help Calais migrants*, 30 November 2017 [cbcew.org.uk/bishops-call-on-uk-government-to-help-calais-migrants/](https://www.cbcew.org.uk/bishops-call-on-uk-government-to-help-calais-migrants/)

¹⁷ *Joint Statement from Catholic and Anglican Bishops for Refugee Week*, 20 June 2021

seekingsanctuary.weebly.com/uploads/5/1/3/5/51352511/world-refugee-week---joint-statement-by-anglicanrc-bishops---jun-21.pdf

¹⁸ Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Bishop urges UK and France to address underlying reasons why people risk their lives crossing English Channel*, 21 July 2020 [cbcew.org.uk/bishop-urges-uk-and-france-to-address-english-channel-crossings-humanely/](https://www.cbcew.org.uk/bishop-urges-uk-and-france-to-address-english-channel-crossings-humanely/)

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Message on the occasion of the 109th meeting of the International Labour Organization (ILO)*, 17 June 2021 [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/20210617-videomessaggio-oil.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/20210617-videomessaggio-oil.html)

imperatives to which we should call our leaders in shaping Europe's economic relationship with the rest of the world.

They should also be an essential consideration in the EU's economic cooperation with its closest neighbours. One aspect of Brexit that has received comparatively little attention is the implications for trade with poorer countries. While existing EU frameworks already facilitate some access to European markets, the UK is now exploring unilateral changes to tariffs and rules of origin.²⁰ Decisions taken in this sphere will have a profound effect, for better or worse, on some of the world's poorest people.

At the same time questions are being raised about how the UK approaches labour rights and wider issues of human dignity in trade negotiations, with the Church in England and Wales urging the Government to ensure that all new agreements contain at least the same type of conditions as are included in EU deals, while preferably going further.²¹

Cooperation between neighbours on these issues should form part of a wider exploration into how European trade can have a positive impact on the world, beyond strengthening our own economies. Through working together, EU members and other European states are better placed to advance endeavours such as eliminating slavery from our supply chains and giving less developed nations a greater share in decision making, thereby supporting the Holy Father's vision for a global economy capable of *"assisting individuals and communities to achieve their deepest aspirations and the universal common good."*²²

Arms

During the pandemic Pope Francis stressed that: *"this is not a time for continuing to manufacture and deal in arms, spending vast amounts of money that ought to be used to care for others and save lives."*²³ As Europe begins to look beyond Covid-19, we need to take a new approach to the arms trade as part of 'building back better'.

Collectively European countries are the second biggest supplier of arms in the world. This has a direct bearing on the pursuit of justice and peace as well as the human interconnectedness to which Pope Francis calls the world unceasingly. European weaponry is being used in conflict zones such as Yemen, Gaza, and Ethiopia. Many refugees arriving on European shores are fleeing conflict or human rights abuses fuelled by our arms sales. Pope Francis also reminds us that: *"war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment."*²⁴ The arms trade not only detracts from investment in protecting our planet but fuels conflicts that harm it.²⁵

²⁰ Economist, *Brexit Britain wants to liberalise trade with poor countries*, 14 August 2021

[economist.com/britain/2021/08/14/brexit-britain-wants-to-liberalise-trade-with-poor-countries](https://www.economist.com/britain/2021/08/14/brexit-britain-wants-to-liberalise-trade-with-poor-countries)

²¹ Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Brexit, Trade and Human Rights*, 12 May 2017

[cbcew.org.uk/brexit-trade-and-human-rights/](https://www.cbcew.org.uk/brexit-trade-and-human-rights/)

²² Pope Francis, *Letter to Participants in 2021 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund*, 5-11 April 2021

[vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210404_lettera-banca-mondiale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210404_lettera-banca-mondiale.html)

²³ Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Easter 2020*, 21 April 2020

[vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200412_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200412_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html)

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Address to the UN General Assembly*, 25 September 2015

[vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html)

²⁵ Conflict and Environment Observatory, *Deforestation in conflict areas in 2020*, April 2021 ceobs.org/assessment-of-recent-forest-loss-in-conflict-areas/

The EU Common Position on arms export controls is intended to ensure that weapons sales by member states do not undermine international peace or human rights, but while this position is legally binding, it currently has no formal enforcement mechanism. Furthermore, there remains a lack of clarity about how the criteria it sets out should be applied.²⁶ Consequently the flow of arms from Europe continues to jeopardise the global common good, and European nations are neglecting to achieve the positive foreign policy outcomes that can be fostered by a strict arms-control regime.

The Holy See is leading calls for countries to participate in armament reduction as part of “*a more cohesive and responsible cooperation*” in response to security challenges facing the world today.²⁷ This appeal has long been taken up by individual European Bishops’ Conferences as well as bodies such as COMECE²⁸ and Justice and Peace Europe.²⁹ We therefore believe that the Conference on the Future of Europe should endeavour to make the current EU arms exports control mechanisms more effective and deepen cooperation on this issue with neighbouring states including the UK.

Humanitarian aid

As in many other countries, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought humanitarian crisis into the lived experience of the public and the Church in the UK, to an extent that is unprecedented in modern times. Amid the uncertainty and pain, tremendous generosity has been shown by people of faith in supporting aid efforts both at home and in distant locations.

Yet, as Pope Francis highlighted in his address to the UN General Assembly last year: “*Humanitarian crises have become the status quo, in which people’s right to life, liberty and personal security are not protected*”, requiring us to work for “*a more fraternal and compassionate society*.”³⁰ In this context continued cooperation between the UK Government, its European neighbours and EU institutions, as well as between the Church in the UK and mainland Europe, is of vital importance.

At its best, cooperation at the European level between governments and EU institutions has enshrined a political commitment to life-saving aid and protection, based on humanity, impartiality and need. The Church and its partners in the Caritas confederation have played their role both in advocating for such a principled approach to humanitarian aid, as well as raising funds and other resources to support it. The European Humanitarian Consensus, adopted by European governments and EU institutions in 2007, enshrines the preservation of life, the prevention and alleviation of suffering, and the maintenance of human dignity in the face of natural and man-made disasters, as the overriding objectives of humanitarian action.³¹ It has proven a critically important reference point to keep this focus on aid spending, in the face

²⁶ Foreign Policy, *Europe is at War over Arms Exports*, 18 September 2019 foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/18/europe-is-at-war-over-arms-exports/

²⁷ Archbishop Paul Gallagher, *Statement at the High-Level Segment of the 2021 Session of the Conference on Disarmament*, 24 February 2021 holyseemission.org/contents//statements/6038fdf8e7ab5.php

²⁸ COMECE, *How can the EU promote sustainable peace and human development?*, 1 October 2019 comece.eu/how-can-the-eu-promote-sustainable-peace-and-human-development

²⁹ Justice and Peace Europe, *How the European Justice and Peace National Commissions could decisively help to eradicate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons*, 2007 juspax-eu.org/de-wAssets/docs/concerted_action/2007/1_Concerted_Action_2007_Proliferation_of_small_arm_and_light_weopons_-_Expos_.pdf

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Address to the UN General Assembly*, 25 September 2020 vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200925_videomessaggio-onu.html

³¹ European Commission, *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/european-consensus_en

of pressures to redirect resources only towards countries and projects that reflect political agendas such as counter-terrorism and stopping migration.³²

Next year (24-26 January 2022), the French government and EU institutions will convene a high-level European Humanitarian Forum to take stock of European cooperation on humanitarian aid and explore ways forward.³³ The Church, particularly through cooperation at the European level, has much to offer to deliberations between governments, institutions, and aid agencies on effective approaches. Pope Francis has emphasised the need for a response to the pandemic and other crises that is rooted in the “*effective promotion of the poorest*” and “*makes them protagonists in the social network.*”³⁴ In doing so, he articulates the Church’s teachings on solidarity, subsidiarity and the intrinsic dignity and agency of all people. As European donor institutions and humanitarian agencies grapple with calls to support the resilience of communities and to ‘localise’ aid, by better working with and empowering institutions in countries affected by crisis, the European Church, the Caritas confederation, and other partners engaged in humanitarian aid can make a valuable contribution. For example, research by the Caritas Internationalis humanitarian policy taskforce has highlighted priority changes in policy and practice that European and other donors could implement to better support local leadership of crisis response.³⁵

Recent years have also seen EU institutions, European donor governments and aid agencies attempt more holistic approaches to crisis response through better linking up humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace efforts (often referred to as working across ‘the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus’). However, the current ways in which European governments and other actors work across this nexus have sometimes raised concerns over their technocratic approach and the extent to which addressing humanitarian needs and protection concerns can become over-shadowed by political agendas. Here too, we must take up the Holy Father’s call for an ‘*integral ecology*’ approach to understanding the challenges facing us, and for a more comprehensive response to crises, factoring in debt forgiveness, generous approaches to social protection, and peacebuilding efforts.

Caring for our common home

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)’s Sixth Assessment Report, released earlier this year, confirmed what scientists and our lived experience have told us about climate change.³⁶ It is here and it is already impacting lives, as we have witnessed in recent months amid forest fires in southern Europe and floods in western Europe. A recent study into the devastating floods across Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands showed that human-caused climate change made the downpour up to 20% heavier and that this is now nine-times more likely to occur in future.³⁷

³² Caritas Europa, *Bridging the gap between policy and practice* caritas.eu/bridging-the-gap-between-policy-and-practice/

³³ European Commission, *European Humanitarian Forum 2022* ec.europa.eu/echo/events/european-humanitarian-forum_en

³⁴ Pope Francis, *Address to the UN General Assembly*, 25 September 2020 vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200925_videomessaggio-onu.html

³⁵ Caritas Internationalis, *Localisation in Covid19 - Experience of Caritas national organisations with humanitarian funding, partnerships and coordination in the Covid19 pandemic* interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/localisation-covid19-experience-caritas-national-organisations-humanitarian-funding-partnerships-and

³⁶ IPCC, *Sixth Assessment Report*, 2021 ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/

³⁷ World Weather Attribution, *Rapid attribution of heavy rainfall events leading to the severe flooding in Western Europe during July 2021* worldweatherattribution.org/wp-content/uploads/Scientific-report-Western-Europe-floods-2021-attribution.pdf

In response to these events, the EU along with the Church offered support through rescue efforts, aid, and shelter³⁸. This was and is the right thing to do. Nevertheless, it is also pertinent to recognise, as Pope Francis emphasises, that our collective action: *“cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources.”*³⁹ Rather, we need to recognise that: *“we are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it... we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”*⁴⁰

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg and President of COMECE, echoed this in his opening remarks to the COMECE reflection day on *Laudato Si’* earlier this year, as he referred to the *“multifaceted”* crisis and reminded participants to co-create a new path for humanity as a *“planetary community”*.⁴¹ This approach has also been adopted by the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, where we have made the intentional decision to embed our work on the climate crisis within our Social Justice Department.

In Pope Francis’ letter to Cardinal Parolin on the 40th anniversary of COMECE, he highlighted the dangerous temptation to seek: *“unilateral solutions to a problem that transcends state borders.”*⁴² Protecting our common home necessitates working globally, including with our closest neighbours with whom we share stewardship of various oceans, skies, and ecosystems. The European Church, the EU and the UK should continue to work in partnership, as friends, and build upon the continent’s history of being *“at the vanguard of efforts to promote ecology.”*⁴³

In the same spirit, it is important that political and economic dialogue between the EU and its neighbours over issues such as agriculture or fishing rights, should also take account of our collective responsibility to protect the environment, a factor which is too often overlooked or relegated to secondary importance.

Given the pressing urgency with which we must act, Pope Francis stresses the importance of healthy institutions in facing a crisis that is simultaneously ecological and social.⁴⁴ The Conference on the Future of Europe represents an opportunity for both the Church in Europe and the EU to reflect on what actions can we take to build a more socially and ecologically just world.

³⁸ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, *EU Supporting Belgium With Flood Response*, 15 July 2021 ec.europa.eu/echo/news/eu-supporting-belgium-flood-response_en and National Catholic Reporter, *German churches pray, provide aid as European flooding death toll climbs*, 20 July 2021

ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/german-churches-pray-provide-aid-european-flooding-death-toll-climbs

³⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, Paragraph 111 [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

⁴⁰ Ibid, Paragraph 139

⁴¹ <http://www.comece.eu/laudato-si-drives-radical-change-and-the-path-to-a-just-future>

⁴² Pope Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis on Europe, 2020* [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201022_lettera-parolin-europa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201022_lettera-parolin-europa.html)

⁴³ Pope Francis, *Address to the European Parliament*, 25 November 2014 [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html)

⁴⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, Paragraph 142 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Crucially, it represents an opportunity to recognise, through the endeavours of human creativity and ingenuity, that “*never has humanity had such power over itself*”,⁴⁵ nor such a fundamental understanding of the challenge that lies before us.

This dialogue is essential to shaping the collective choices we make about our common future and requires a shift in focus towards the concept of ‘*integral ecology*’. Drawing on *Laudato Si’*, we can frame our conversation about the future of Europe in relation to the climate crisis and the role of the Church: “*When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values.*”⁴⁶

Conclusion

In his 2014 address to the European Parliament, Pope Francis stated: “*the time has come to work together in building a Europe which revolves not around the economy, but around the sacredness of the human person, around inalienable values.*”⁴⁷

It is our firm conviction that recent political changes will not undermine collaboration with our sisters and brothers in the Church throughout Europe, a collaboration to which the Church in England and Wales remains more committed than ever. Furthermore, we will continue to encourage the institutions of the EU, the governments of member states, and the UK to cooperate closely.

Our aspiration for the Conference on the Future of Europe is therefore twofold. Firstly, that it will put people at the centre; exploring a humanitarian approach to refugee flows, an economic vision rooted in human dignity, meaningful controls on the sale of weaponry, effective provision of aid to the world’s poorest communities, and an ambitious plan to protect the environment. Secondly that in each of these areas it will recognise the paramount importance of working with neighbours who, while not part of the EU, are inalienable parts of Europe.

We extend our prayers and best wishes to all involved in this vital dialogue.

Rt Rev Nicholas Hudson

Lead Bishop for Europe

Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales - Department for International Affairs

October 2021

⁴⁵ Ibid, Paragraph 104

⁴⁶ Ibid, Paragraph 160

⁴⁷ Pope Francis, *Address to the European Parliament*, 25 November 2014

vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html