
Russia-Ukraine. Msgr. Grusas (CCEE): "War must be urgently averted, now more than ever"

"Now more than ever, all heads of government must urgently intervene together to avert war, to uphold international law and the independence and territorial sovereignty of each country. We join with the Holy Father in calling on the leaders to 'find acceptable and lasting solutions in Ukraine.'" At this crucial time, when global diplomacies are working towards a path of dialogue to avert the use of weapons in Ukraine, Msgr. **Gintaras Linas Grusas**, archbishop of Vilnius (Lithuania), President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), sent an appeal on behalf of all the bishops of the European continent. SIR interviewed him ahead of next week's meeting of Mediterranean bishops and mayors scheduled to take place in Florence next February 23-27, but the conversation inevitably shifted to the winds of war blowing in Eastern Europe. **Can you tell us how the people of that region, of your land, are living this dangerous moment? What are their fears and concerns? I think that the ongoing crisis on the border between Russia and Ukraine is the most dangerous in Europe since the end of the Cold War.** We cannot regard this conflict as limited to the two peoples in that area alone. It involves all of Europe, starting with the neighbouring countries. Every conflict, every war, brings suffering, destruction and poverty, alongside death and casualties. Many elderly people in Lithuania who survived the Second World War have vivid recollections of the events they experienced. These are reminders of our past that we are very much aware of, and they cast a dark shadow also over the current situation and on an inevitable expansion of the conflict. We are aware of the associated risks and we want to do all we can to avoid them. The Lithuanian bishops have asked all people in Lithuania to pray the rosary every day in February for peace in Europe and in the world. All European bishops and Christian communities in this dramatic moment of tension express their closeness to those who are suffering with prayers from the whole Church and with a firm appeal to national leaders to work towards resolving this crisis through dialogue and negotiations, without resorting to weapons. **How can peace - accomplished with so much struggle after two world wars in the last century - be preserved?** In a recent interview, Pope Francis reminded us that war is like an "anti-sense" of creation", that is why war is always destruction. At the Bari meeting, he entrusted the bishops of the countries bordering the Mediterranean with the task of promoting reconciliation and peace: "To restore relationships that have been broken, to rebuild cities destroyed by violence, to instil hope in the hopeless, and to encourage those caught up in themselves not to fear their brothers or sisters." We cannot remain indifferent to continuous attempts at destabilisation and destruction that undermine the unity of our continent. We saw the plight of migrants on the border of Belarus with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, used as human shields to destabilise the situation in what has been called a new hybrid war. We are now witnessing escalating tensions on the border between Russia and Ukraine for geopolitical and economic reasons. *A "hard line of deterrence" must be maintained. Until European countries remain united, I believe deterrence will prove effective. There is a saying that goes: united we stand. In our case, united we also build peace. Together with Pope Francis, we entrust our efforts for peace to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Europe, and to the conscience of political leaders.* **Mediterranean: frontier of peace. To what extent is peace - including in the Mediterranean region - in danger today? Is it possible to build a piecemeal peace in Europe, or do the peoples of Europe and the Mediterranean share a common destiny?** The Mediterranean has always been a place of economic exchanges, a cradle of civilisation and culture, a bridge between the peoples of the region. In the past, it has also been the theatre of battles and of political and religious clashes. The proximity of its shores has encouraged continuous migration flows but, alas, the lack of a proper European migration policy has turned it into Europe's largest cemetery. Effective and comprehensive responses are needed to meet the challenges posed by contemporary migration, shared at European level, to ensure that our many brothers and sisters fleeing war, poverty and violence are welcomed and, at the same time,

integrated into our communities, starting with the four verbs used by Pope Francis: to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate. *We must not assume that what happens in the Mediterranean region only concerns the countries washed by its sea. For better or for worse, its repercussions affect us all, we share a common destiny. That is why everyone must be engaged, at all levels, so that the Mediterranean may resume its role as a crossroads of dialogue and a workshop of peace.* **Which message would you like to convey to the bishops and mayors gathered in Florence?** The example of Giorgio La Pira, who invited the mayors of the world's capitals to Florence to sign a pact of friendship, together with his efforts for peace, with the creation of the Mediterranean Colloquies, can serve as a starting point for an active commitment to peace for us all. To meet, to get to know each other, to dialogue: these are the building blocks of peace. This includes overcoming vested interests, self-centredness and the lust for money and power. The meeting of bishops and mayors is an opportunity to work together towards building the common good and finding shared solutions to the problems of today. *We have the opportunity to work together and dialogue to build peace in an area of crucial importance for the whole world.*

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