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***Together for Europe* – in dialogue with Members of the European
Parliament**

Opening Statement

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Reviving Europe: A “Soul” for Dialogue and Reconciliation

Dear friends,
dear representatives of *Together for Europe*,
dear colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour to welcome you here in the European Parliament.

Let me begin by thanking Maria Wienken, Gerhard Proß, Alberto Lo Presti, and all those who have made this gathering possible. I also want to thank *Together for Europe — Miteinander für Europa* — for your commitment, your perseverance, and your witness.

You are bringing together Christian movements and communities from different churches, different countries, different generations, and different spiritual traditions. That is not a small thing. In a time in which Europe is often tempted by fragmentation, polarisation and mistrust, your very presence is already a message: Europe can be a space where difference does not lead to division, but to encounter. Where diversity does not weaken unity, but enriches it.

The title of today’s conference is deeply important: **“Reviving Europe: A ‘soul’ for dialogue and reconciliation.”**

Europe needs institutions. Europe needs rules. Europe needs a single market, economic strength, competitiveness, security and innovation. But Europe also needs something more fundamental: Europe needs a soul.

A soul means a sense of direction. It means values that are not merely written in treaties, but lived in communities. It means the conviction that the human person has dignity; that freedom and responsibility belong together; that peace is never simply the absence of war, but the fruit of justice, truth and reconciliation.

This is also why the work of *Together for Europe* is so valuable. You remind us that Europe is not built by institutions alone. Europe is built by people. By communities. By citizens who choose dialogue over indifference, reconciliation over resentment, and hope over resignation.

As President of the **Europa-Union Deutschland**, I feel particularly close to this mission. The Europa-Union was born from the conviction that Europe must never again be a continent of nationalism, war and division. Its federalist vision is rooted in a clear idea: Europe's nations do not lose their identity when they work together. On the contrary, they protect their freedom and their future by joining forces.

Federalism, properly understood, is not centralism. It is not uniformity. It is unity in diversity. It is the belief that responsibility must be exercised at the right level — locally, regionally, nationally and European — and that we are stronger when these levels work together in trust.

That is why your ecumenical spirit speaks so directly to the European spirit. You come from different churches, different traditions, different charisms — yet you seek a common path. Europe, too, is made of many languages, histories, regions, nations and memories. The task is not to erase them. The task is to bring them into a shared horizon.

And that is exactly what we need today.

Europe is being built from many corners: from parishes and youth groups, from universities and municipalities, from families, associations, businesses, churches, movements, parliaments and civil society. Often these initiatives are small. Often they are local. Often they do not make headlines. But they carry the European idea forward.

Our responsibility is to connect these energies. To bring them together. To ensure that the many visions for Europe — from faith communities, from young people, from local actors, from committed citizens — are not isolated sparks, but become a common light.

Because Europe will not be revived by technocracy alone. It will be revived by conviction.

It will be revived when we remember what Europe is for.

Europe is for peace.

Europe is for freedom.

Europe is for human dignity.

These values are not abstract. They have been paid for dearly in our history. And they must be defended anew in every generation.

Allow me to share one story from my own region, from my constituency in Baden-Württemberg.

Georg Elser was a simple carpenter from Königsbronn. He was not a general, not a minister, not a famous intellectual. He was one man. But he saw earlier than many others the evil of National Socialism. He understood that this regime

would bring destruction, war and suffering. And he decided that he could not remain passive.

In 1939, Georg Elser attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler. He failed by a matter of minutes. He was arrested, imprisoned and later murdered in Dachau concentration camp.

Today, we remember him not because he succeeded politically, but because he stood morally. He reminds us of something very powerful: history is not only shaped by the masses, by governments, by armies or by institutions. History is also shaped by individuals who have the courage to stand up for truth when it is dangerous, for human dignity when it is denied, and for conscience when silence would be easier.

Of course, our situation today is different. But the moral lesson remains: every person matters. Every conscience matters. Every act of courage matters.

And this is perhaps the most important message for Europe today: each one of us has the power to make Europe better.

Not everyone will write a treaty. Not everyone will sit in a parliament. Not everyone will lead a movement. But everyone can build trust. Everyone can listen. Everyone can reconcile. Everyone can defend the dignity of another person. Everyone can refuse hatred. Everyone can strengthen democracy where they are.

This is especially important when we speak about dialogue.

Dialogue is not weakness. Dialogue is not relativism. Dialogue does not mean giving up one's convictions. True dialogue requires conviction — but also humility. It requires the courage to speak and the discipline to listen. It requires us to see in the other not first an opponent, not first a category, not first a political label, but a human being.

And reconciliation is not forgetfulness. Reconciliation does not erase injustice. It does not deny truth. Real reconciliation begins with truth. But it refuses to let the wounds of the past become the prison of the future.

This is one of the great lessons of European integration. After the horrors of war, Europe did not begin with perfection. It began with a decision: enemies must become neighbours; neighbours must become partners; and partners must become a community of destiny.

That spirit is needed again — within our societies, between generations, between East and West, North and South, between people of faith and people of no faith, between institutions and citizens.

And here, Christian communities have a special contribution to make. Not by imposing faith through politics, but by offering what Europe urgently needs: a language of dignity, forgiveness, service, responsibility and hope.

The Christian roots of Europe are a living source. They remind us that the person is never just an economic actor, never just a voter, never just a consumer, never just a number in a system. The person is created for relationship, for responsibility, for freedom, and for love of neighbour.

That is a message Europe needs.

So let this gathering be more than a conference. Let it be a sign.

A sign that Europe's soul can be renewed.

A sign that faith communities and political institutions can speak with one another constructively.

A sign that young people and older generations can form an intergenerational pact for European citizenship.

A sign that reconciliation is not a word from the past, but a task for the future.

And that is the Europe each one of us can help to build.

Thank you very much.