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

Reviving Europe: A 'soul' for dialogue and reconciliation

Address given by Gerhard Pross

Professor Wechsler, Ms Sberna, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, dear friends of *Together for Europe*,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you - especially you, young people - here to our event.

As a Co-Founder and long-standing Moderator of *Together for Europe*, it is with great joy that I look forward to the dialogue between you, young people, and the MEPs about the soul of Europe. For me, this dialogue is an expression of hope and reflects the founding spirit of *Together for Europe*.

Our early experience in *Together for Europe* lay in the reconciling power of the Christian faith, which made a new way of living together between Christian denominations possible.

The fundamental impulse which led to today's European Union was also based on this power of reconciliation. On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman, then the French Foreign Minister, set it in motion in a speech lasting just three minutes. A mere five years after the Second World War, with its immeasurable suffering, he laid the foundations with a courageous vision of peaceful coexistence.

Reconciliation and peacefully living together instead of isolation, hostility and war: how necessary this message is today too not only for Europe, but for the whole world. François emphasised this powerfully in his address.

The founding fathers Schuman, Adenauer and de Gasperi consciously built Europe on the foundations of the Christian faith. Together they would go to church before embarking on their public political duties.

But how easily these foundations are forgotten. The Christian faith has been supplanted by the public reality of the European Union – and this is precisely where the *Together for Europe* initiative comes into play.

Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement and its president for many years, had a meeting with Romano Prodi in the early 2000s, then President of the European Commission, and urged him to pursue a Christian policy. 'How can I pursue a Christian policy if you do not show yourselves to be Christians?', is the essence of what Prodi is reported to have said. Chiara Lubich brought this idea to the newly launched collaboration between Christian movements and inspired us to work "together for Europe". Giving Europe a soul: this has been the motto that has inspired us ever since and which has found expression in many major events and countless meetings. Christians as the soul of Europe: a strong statement, and yet a profound reality.

And now we face this challenge with renewed drive: to rediscover the soul of Europe. Jeff Fountain laid the foundations for this in his speech. A new way of thinking is both necessary and possible.

The Christian faith as the soul of Europe, as a force for reconciliation that sees diversity not as an enemy, but as an enrichment. For us at *Together for Europe*, it is important to live our faith in this way and thus help to shape society.

But not as a claim to power: the terrible distortion of faith across the Atlantic is deeply harmful. We reject any religious glorification of our claims to power.

On the basis of our faith, we are committed to reconciliation, to peace, to the environment and to the poor. We have consciously chosen the name 'TOGETHER' and 'FOR' because this is precisely what matters to us. The diversity of cultures in Europe is not a threat to us, but a source of richness.

It is my wish and my hope that this impetus will be taken up and put into practice by you, the young people. You are the future.

May hope find a home in Europe.