

SPEECH OF HIS EMINENCE
METROPOLITAN EMMANUEL OF FRANCE
ON THE OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE
« **MIGRATION IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS** »
Bucharest, 17 June 2011

Let me first of all warmly thank His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania for his enlightening thoughts regarding our topic at hand. Having said that and wishing to further extend the analysis that has just been offered, I would like to look at the migration issues from the perspective of the actions that can be taken by the Churches. In other words: Is there a specifically Christian response to this issue that our Churches would be likely to offer? Does the Gospel offer an angle of approach to this issue making thus the response of our Churches complementary to that of the States, if not essential in itself?

These questions are not merely rhetorical. Moreover, during the closing of 2010 as a year dedicated to migration by the Conference of European Churches, it was very clearly stated that "Christians are migrants by vocation"! What is there to say and how to interpret this statement with regard to the treatment of those most vulnerable in highly diverse contexts, namely the immigrants. Indeed, for twelve months, the Christian communities from across Europe rallied not only to attract the attention of political authorities on the alarming aspects of migration, but also for a direct and concrete action to assist those most vulnerable. The forced migration, the situation and the treatment of refugees, the exploitation and trafficking of human beings, the effects of climate change on migratory flows, the irregular situation of certain migrants and the incertitude that such situations foster, all these situations, the reasons and other circumstances cannot be subjected only to political deadlines. This would constitute a failure of democracy. Therefore, our commitment as men and women of the church is not temporary; this perspective is rooted in the understanding of an immutable human dignity shared by each and every person regardless of one's social status, ethnic origin or even one's bank account. Indeed, some people talk about the universality of the Good News of the Risen Christ being applied to the smallest. Hasn't Christ actually taught us this very lesson: "I tell you the truth, whenever you have done these things unto one of these the most lowly of my brethren, it is to me that you have done them."(Mt 25.40)

It is therefore that concrete and targeted actions have been undertaken across Europe: distribution of food, aid to the immigrants' rights, access to places of worship, visiting of detainees. Similarly, a recent study undertaken by the World Organization for Migration has shown how religion, and more so the Christian communities, constitute integrating vectors of the first class. The protection of the most vulnerable migrants undoubtedly goes through their integration. The initiatives we have mentioned tend to participate in this very process.

However, the major economic crisis that has threaded the world in recent years has witnessed the birth of a parallel rising of populist movements that act as barriers to the integration of alien populations. The rise of racist color-based movements, clearly xenophobic, makes us understand more visibly that the dangers of exclusion are festering in a shared indifference. This is unacceptable. Solidarity cannot be subjected to such considerations. Pope Benedict XVI recently reminded of the importance of Europe with respect to the Roma community. This latter community has crystallized a completely insane number of stereotypes and discriminatory provisions. The Churches and other Christian communities have also realized that the difficulty of dealing with migration issues is not just a mechanical issue, it clearly

refers to a worldview in which diversity is an asset and not a blemish. Only by reading openly this diversity is it likely to perpetuate the presence of national minorities and new ethnic communities on the European continent in the building of its multicultural identity that has always been exercised.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The message that I would like to remind you of today is this statement: "Christians are migrants by vocation". With these words and the meaning they contain, we make the migrant status ours; we share their weaknesses in order to offer them our help and our strength. The involvement of the Churches in view of migrants did not stop in 2010. Quite the contrary, this year dedicated to migration has raised awareness of the extent of this issue and the importance of continuing with long-term projects. In Christianity, the weak, the vulnerable always keeps a face. The diversity, of which we are making ourselves the heroes of, has meaning only if we reveal the object, namely the very subject of our faith, the image of God, which he has fashioned himself for us.

Thank you for your attention.