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Meeting for Friendship amongst People
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Immigration and the Need for Others: Italy, Europe and the World

Rimini, August 25, 2014 – “The title of this session can be read in an ambivalent way: The other is in need, but, in the same way, we need the other, because the other can be something good for us. We need to understand the increasing dimension of the phenomenon, considering that in 2012 more than 232 million people left their home countries and migrated somewhere else.” These were the opening words of Roberto Fontolan, Director of the Communion and Liberation International Center, during the session held today in Salone D5, at 11:15 am. Among the speakers were Admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi, Chief of the Italian Navy, Sandro Gozi, State Secretary for European Affairs of Italy, Msgr. Michele Pennisi, Archbishop of Monreale, Msgr. Silvano Tommasi, Permanent Observer of Holy See to the United Nations, and Carla Trommino, Representative of the AccoglieRete Association, whose mission is to protect unaccompanied minors.

De Giorgi remarked that the increased landings of the last few years in Sicily are not a consequence of the Mare Nostrum project promoted by the Italian government, but rather, are the consequence of wars and conflicts afflicting the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. “Mare Nostrum,” the Admiral continued “is a humanitarian operation and one of civility, because it prevented the Mediterranean Sea from turning into a huge cemetery and prevented migrants from falling into the hands of the criminals responsible for the clandestine landings thus far. Furthermore, such an operation allowed for health security management directly onboard, preventing the spread of infectious diseases”.

Msgr. Michele Pennisi, Archbishop of Monreale, criticized the prevailing political approach to immigration. He believes that it “overlook migrants by relegating their care to large welcoming centers. It would be better, instead, to increase protection for refugees and those seeking political asylum. This, in fact, would facilitate integration as it would set a limit on the number of migrants in each city” and it would identify a personalized educational path, using fellowship programs, internships, and language courses in Italian. Msgr. Pennisi continued that “We cannot possibly imagine that Sicily and Italy should bear the entire responsibility of immigrants.”

Carla Trommino began her contribution pointing out that her association went beyond the traditional idea of institutional adoption and moved towards personalized tutoring, by focusing on broad and decentralized welcoming and by providing a personal tutor for each minor. “I realized the challenge presented by the immigration of unaccompanied minors when, after defending them as a lawyer, I welcomed one of them into my house. Permits and legal documents are important details, but they represent only a pre-condition: what is at stake for us is a cultural challenge”. The association is strengthening its welcoming network and invites everybody (family, association, and institutional body) to do their part.

Sandro Gozi insisted that “what is happening in the Mediterranean Sea – the cradle of ancient civilization – is unacceptable: our sea is becoming the cemetery of Europeans who still haven’t learned from their past”. Europe, Gozi continued, needs to show that it is not simply an economic union but rather that it has a unified vision of its future, as well as of the future of the whole world, for which it needs to sacrifice its immediate interests.” According to Gozi, now it is the time to go back to the courageous approaches held



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by great statesmen such as De Gasperi, Spinelli and Kohl: “There is no time to waste: Mare Nostrum needs to be coupled with a European initiative. Foreign policy and immigration policies should go hand in hand, if we want to solve the problems afflicting the Mediterranean area. Matteo Renzi’s visit to Iraq marks a step in this direction”.

Msgr. Tommasi also remarked that “migration is a global phenomenon. One out of seven people, on a global scale, is either an internal or an external migrant in any given country. Migrants can become, for each of us, either a risk or an opportunity. Politics cannot use immigration to gain consensus, as it happened in the recent European elections.” He continued by saying that “We need to be realistic: the other is already with us. In fact, a big chunk of the European workforce (10 to 15 percent) is made up of immigrants. That’s why we need to manage this phenomenon well, so we can build our future together with these brothers of ours.” Westerners, he argued, are very good at setting human rights into treatises and onto paper. However, everyday life is different: “We ought to manage immigration in a global and inclusive way that leaves room for the voice of everybody. Brotherhood remains the rock on which to build integration.”

(A.S.)

Stefano Pichi Sermolli

Meeting Spokesperson, Head of the Press&Communication Office

Press Office: Erika Elleri

Tel: 3480138786

E-mail: erika.elleri@meetingrimini.org