

Your Eminence Athenagoras,

Your Excellency Ambassador Sophia Grammata,

Mr. Vice-President of the EU,

Honourable Members of the Parliaments of Cyprus, Bulgaria and Greece,

It is a real privilege for me to open the today's event. Not only because of the high level attendance. Mainly because Saint Sophia, next to its grandeur, is a symbol. It is not just a Christian temple without a match.

Originally, before Justinian in 537 achieved the chef d'oeuvre that remains to this day, it was built by Constantine the Great on an ancient Greek temple. As such it symbolises the constructive meeting of two worlds, two worldviews; the Hellenistic world as propagated from Rome to the rest of the then known world, and the Christian world as propagated via a pagan language, the Greek. Reason and faith were thus bound together. Logic and empathy. They do form by now the European identity as it is reflected in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union referring to the European values. Respect for human dignity, Democracy, the Rule of Law, solidarity, equality, tolerance, justice and so on and so-forth.

However, the dimension of faith is missing. Not as a religion, but as a way of life. Significantly, the current European Commission created a mission for one of its Vice Presidents, present today, to cover this gap.

No doubt, this return and signal might be of paramount importance. Is it enough?

Suffice to consider that if Europeans, back in history, had stood together, united behind the shield of their common routes, St Sophia might today be under the European rule and the geography of Europe might be different.

Everything flows and, at the same time, history is going through circles. As the entire world is experiencing these last years geopolitical challenges and other important changes due to the climate change and the development of sustainable energy sources, as well as and the (r)evolution of Artificial Intelligence, it would be important to bear in mind the lessons of our history, our common origins and our European identity. This would armour the European Union to confront the future successfully and contribute to the restoration of world peace.