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A sea of men in violet zucchettos sits in front of Pope Francis and a man in a black cassock wi

Pope Francis speaks to members of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union during an audience at the Vatican March 23, 2023, with members attending the commission's plenary meeting. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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While promoting dialogue and building relationships with leaders of the European Union contribute to peace, bishops in EU countries also must be prophetic in denouncing war and encouraging all possible efforts to restore peace, Pope Francis said.

"One principle should be shared by all with clarity and determination: war cannot and should no longer be considered a solution to conflict," the pope said March 23 during a meeting with bishops participating in the plenary assembly of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union.

"If the countries of today's Europe do not share this ethical-political principle, then it means they have strayed from the original dream" of the European Union, the pope

said. "If, on the other hand, they do share it, they must commit themselves to implementing it, with all the effort and complexity that the historical situation requires."

During the commission's assembly, members elected Bishop Mariano Crociata of Latina, Italy, as their new president. He succeeds Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, who finished his five-year term.

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Crociata told the pope that the commission members "feel a strong responsibility" to unite their bishops' conferences with "the pope and with his indications, convinced as we are that only in the witness of unity can the presence and action of the church be effective in a European journey marked by ever new crises, the latest among them the war in Ukraine."

The war in Ukraine has shaken Europe, the pope said. "Neighboring nations have done their best to welcome refugees," and Europeans have shown tremendous solidarity with the Ukrainian people, donating massive amounts of food, clothing and emergency equipment.

"This choral response on the level of charity should be matched by a cohesive commitment to peace, but it is clear that this is neither easy nor obvious," Francis said, because with the countries of the European Union being "involved in multiple alliances, interests, strategies," a single response to ending the war has been difficult to find.

As a bridge between the church and the institutions of the European Union, commission members have a mission to be "builders of relationships, of encounter, of dialogue. And that is already working for peace. But it is not enough," the pope said. "It also takes prophecy, it takes foresight, it takes creativity to advance the cause of peace."