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A man wears a cardinal's cassock and zucchetto and shakes a bald man in a suit's hand

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, greets Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican April 27, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Asking European leaders for "creative efforts for peace" in Ukraine, the Vatican secretary of state said the Holy See "will continue to do its part."

"We cannot accept passively that the war of aggression in that tormented country continues," Cardinal Pietro Parolin said May 16 at the Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavík, Iceland.

Heads of state and government of the council's 46 member countries voted to establish a "Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine" with a view toward eventually making Russia pay reparations.

"The Council of Europe was founded in the wake of the Second World War, born out of the conviction that 'the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international cooperation is vital for the preservation of human society and civilization,'" the leaders said in their final declaration. "It is a peace project, built on the promise of 'never again,' a promise that has been fundamentally challenged by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine."

Parolin, addressing the leaders, also spoke about the Council of Europe's self-definition as "a peace project."

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"Unfortunately," he said, "the war in Ukraine shows us that the passionate quest of the politics of community and the strengthening of multilateral relations seems a wistful memory from a distant past. We seem to be witnessing the sorry sunset of that choral dream of peace."

"In the spirit of the founders of this organization and together with Pope Francis, we should ask ourselves -- while thinking not least of war-torn Ukraine -- where are creative efforts for peace?" Parolin said.

European leaders must keep in mind those who are suffering and dying in Ukraine, he said. "This is the time to take action and establish a definitive and just peace in Ukraine and in all the other so-called gray areas of Europe."

The Council of Europe describes as gray zones "areas where monitoring mechanisms cannot function freely or effectively." They include Crimea, forcibly annexed by Russia in 2014; Transnistria, which is part of Moldova; and the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are internationally recognized as part of Georgia.

In their declaration, summit participants called on the Russian Federation "to comply with its international obligations and to immediately withdraw completely and unconditionally its forces from Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. We reassert our unwavering support for their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, within their internationally recognized borders."