

Meeting: Discernment on the humanitarian crisis at the Eastern border of the EU

1. Song/ Taizé/ Music

You can choose one of the following songs:

- ✚ Christ, be our light: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIDPd8d3oQE>
- ✚ Becoming what we pray: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSo4uYwTJ9o>

2. Information

What do we know about the humanitarian crisis at the border between Poland and Belarus?
How does it affect us?

Materials that can be used in this phase as preparation for the discernment (before the meeting):

- ✚ The humanitarian crisis at the Eastern border of the EU – letter from Kasia (page 7)
- ✚ Short news report: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ogd6heKu46c>
- ✚ Press Conference in Sokółka (wild forest area) organized by Grupa Granica in Polish and English: <https://www.facebook.com/grupagranica/videos/4134405269996833/>

You can also use materials and articles available in your languages.

3. Prayer time

- ✚ Read aloud the text by Franz Kamphaus, former bishop of Limburg, Germany.
- ✚ Choose one person that draws your attention in the photos below.
- ✚ Take 5-10 minutes of silence to meditate and pray with the text and the picture of the person you chose.
- ✚ Read aloud the text by Pope Francis.

4. Sharing in three rounds

First round

- ✚ What touches me in the situation at the border between Poland and Belarus? What feelings do I have?
- ✚ What touches me when I think about the person in the picture I chose?
- ✚ Did the text by Pope Francis touch me? Why?

A short time of silence (or Taizé song)

Second round:

- ✚ What touched me in other peoples' sharing?

A short time of silence (or Taizé song)

Third round:

- ✚ What encourages me in the sharings I have heard?
- ✚ What could be a message for me today?
- ✚ Do I feel called to any action?

5. Is the situation at the border between Poland and Belarus a call for action for us?

Watch the video with testimonies of some members of local communities who are engaged in helping migrants in the state-of-emergency zone in Poland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUmy2h-9Yk0>

If you feel called to an active response to the situation, you can exchange ideas on different ways to get involved.

If you want to get engaged at the European level, please share your ideas with the European Migration Network and the Euroteam.

6. Blessing (to read aloud)

Bless us, God, you who are going with us,

God in Egypt and Babylon, God in Syria and Africa.

Bless us, Jesus Christ,

Child on the run, homeless, a refugee, a migrant child.

Bless us, Holy Spirit,

Comforter and breath of life, cooling and power.

Bless us, God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

7. Song

- ✚ Here I am Lord: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBg-yDhM2KY>

Texts for the Sharing

Text by Franz Kamphaus :

"Every day in the media, close to us in our room, we see people who are being wronged. It is written all over the faces of the starving and the displaced. You can see it - and yet not see it. You know: "You can only see well with your heart...". How about deliberately choosing a programme or a newspaper article in the coming days and weeks in which the rights of the poor are discussed? Or you give a picture your full attention, put it explicitly in front of your eyes in your home and take it to your heart. Then your eyes may open anew.

Text by Pope Francis

I was a stranger... Each one of you, the refugees who knock at our doors, bears the face of God, is the flesh of Christ. Your experience of sorrow and hope reminds us that we are all strangers and pilgrims on this Earth, generously welcomed by someone and by no merit of our own. Whoever, like you, has fled his homeland for reasons of oppression, war, nature disfigured by pollution and desertification, or the unjust distribution of natural resources: this is the brother with whom to share bread, home and life. Too many times have we failed to welcome you! Forgive the closedness and indifference of our societies who fear the change in life and mentality that your presence requires. Though treated as a burden, a problem, a cost, you are a gift. You are witnesses to how our kind and merciful God can transform the evil and injustice you suffer into a good for all. For every one of you can be a bridge that unites distant peoples, that makes an encounter between diverse cultures and religions possible, a way to rediscover our common humanity.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160419_videomessaggio-centro-astalli-35anniv.html

Photos







Letter from Kasia, member of the Euroteam

Warsaw, 14.11.2021

"For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

Dear Friends,

It's been nearly three months since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis on the borders between Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. We are very sad to inform you that the situation is escalating and getting worse, especially at the Polish – Belarusian border, which most of the migrants and refugees have been trying to cross recently, risking their lives and being exposed to extreme violence and suffering. Many people decide to set on this journey with lots of hopes to get to Europe and have a better life. In many cases, they aren't aware of what's ahead of them.

As you have probably heard, the Belarusian regime initiated and is supporting human smuggling through organised flights and transport to the border area in the middle of a huge wild forest as well as on the river Bug and swamps between the two countries, where migrants and refugees aren't legally allowed to cross. Having arrived in the capital city of Belarus - Minsk, people get on buses or cars (often organized trips) to the border area where they get stuck because there is no way back. The Belarusian border guards force them to cross the border in the middle of the wilderness, forbidding them to go to legal border crossings. They're guarded and kept in the forest without food and water until they go. Many migrants report that the Belarusian border guards push them, use force, set dogs on them or shoot under their feet to make them cross the border with Poland.

On the Polish side, the government has broken international law and human rights by legalising push-backs. So the Polish border guards have orders to force migrants back to Belarus. And this is how the 'ping pong' begins as the Belarusian guards don't let people go back and force them to cross the border again. Some migrants managed to get out of this power game. Some got ill and ended up in hospitals. Many migrants and refugees keep wandering in the wilderness without food and water in the cold, hiding from the guards on both sides of the border. They're in a terrible state - physically and mentally.

A great number of Polish NGOs reacted immediately and rushed to the border to help the migrants. They have assisted many of those who wanted to ask for asylum in Poland in completing the necessary papers. Unfortunately, the access to many migrants in the wilderness has been restricted since the Polish authorities decided to introduce a state of emergency in the close border area. As a result, nobody is allowed to get there, except the locals who live in the area, the army and border guards. The NGOs can only assist migrants in further areas and cooperate with the locals who live within the state-of-emergency zone. Despite all the obstacles, more and more NGOs, parishes, local groups and individual people are getting involved in the support network. There are many intervention points and volunteers in the forest, including doctors and lawyers who have offered their help. Many people support the volunteers and organizations from their places: collecting warm clothes and other necessary things, cooking soups or providing transport.

We have been in touch with people and organisations at the border since the beginning of the crisis. The stories we get from them are terrifying. Migrants and refugees found in the forest often are in a critical state - hungry, thirsty, with hypothermia. There are many families with children, men and women of different ages - some of them elderly.

There are numerous appeals, petitions, official statements written by various institutions and organisations, including the Catholic Church, asking the Polish authorities to stop bush-backs and provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees, as well as look for systemic solutions and include the European Union. All of them have been refused. Instead, the Polish government keeps claiming that they are in control (at the moment of writing).

The most important need at the moment is to allow local and international organizations immediate access to the restricted border area and provide the necessary assistance to the migrants and refugees in the forest. We also need to invite international observers and independent media to report the development of events and all cases of violence at the border.

We would like to invite all communities in Europe to begin a process of discernment, asking ourselves and God how we can respond to this humanitarian crisis at the Eastern border of the EU.

Kasia and the Euroteam