



INTERCULTURAL & RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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11 JANUARY 2022

BRUSSELS

MEETING WITH H.E. CARDINAL JEAN-CLAUDE HOLLERICH S.J., PRESIDENT OF COMECE, ARCHBISHOP OF LUXEMBOURG AND FR. MANUEL ENRIQUE BARRIOS PRIETO, GENERAL SECRETARY OF COMECE

AGENDA

- 19.00 Opening by the Co-Chairman of the Working Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
- 19.30 Exchange of views with:
H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), Archbishop of Luxembourg
Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, Secretary General of COMECE
- 21.30 Conclusions



Exchange of views with H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), Archbishop of Luxembourg and Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, Secretary General of COMECE about the planned activities of the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Working Group activities for 2022 and how to increase the WG's visibility inside and outside the EPP Group.

18 JANUARY 2022

STRASBOURG

MEETING WITH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S COMMITTEE ON THE INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCONVICTIONAL DIALOGUE

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairman of the Working Group **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Presentation and exchange of views with the Council of Europe's Committee on the Interreligious and interconvictional dialogue:
 - **Gabriela Frey**, European Buddhist Union
 - **Sören Lenz**, Conference of European Churches
 - **Jean-François Bour**, Justice & Paix Europe
3. Questions & Answers



MEP Jan Olbrycht, Sören Lenz, Gabriela Frey, Roman Strasser and Jean-François Bour

Together with a number of other faith partners, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) emphasised the role of religion and education in dialogue in a meeting of the Interreligious and Inter-Convictional Dialogue Committee of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe (CoE).

CEC Executive Secretary Rev. Sören Lenz, Gabriela Frey of the European Buddhist Union and Jean-François Bour of the Democracy, European Construction and Religions (DECERE), offered a joint presentation, in which they elaborated on religion's potential for dialogue in overcoming conflict, as well as education through inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue, and the promotion of diversity and inclusiveness.

“We look at education in the sense of German word Bildung, which implies professional training and fact-based learning, together with cultural knowledge, and personality development, including critical discernment and a sense of social responsibility,” they said.

“Education is not limited to school but is a lifelong activity. Education is the sense of knowledge and the perception of how others think and feel. Education is holistic and concerns the whole human individual. Empathy, respect, and self-reflection are essential aspects of this education.”

“In this sense, education is foremost about learning self-critical analysis of one's position in relation with others who think and feel differently. For this reason, we consider education to be an essential element of dialogue, especially in inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue,” they stated.

“The best way to counter hate is to generate confidence among people. Education and personal development are key for democratic and free societies,” stressed Rev. Lenz.

The speakers highlighted the role of faith communities in contributing to a democratic and peaceful society. They discussed educational programs that already exist in religious communities, reflecting on finding fruitful ways of building bridges through the Dialogue Committee.

The CEC and the European Buddhist Union initiative are both participatory members of the Council of Europe, the Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue Committee. CEC Executive Secretary Rev. Sören Lenz and Gabriela Frey serve as committee co-chairs. The committee, established last year at the INGO Conference following a recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE, aims to contribute to dialogue in bringing together several other European faith-based NGOs.

3-4 MARCH 2022

ROME
VISIT TO THE ROMAN CURIA
FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS IN THE DICASTERIES



Gábor Török, Sabina Grzanka, MEP Lukas Mandl, Mons. Massimiliano Boiardi, MEP György Hölvényi, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP Željana Zovko, Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, MEP Miriam Lexmann, Romain Strasser

I. MEETING WITH MONS. MASSIMILIANO BOIARDI, EU DEPARTMENT, SECRETARIAT OF STATE

- a) European Union: Elections reflect ongoing transformation. There is an advanced secularisation of society.
- b) Across Europe, there are legislative acts and draft bills conflicting with Christian values. There is a need to defend our principles. Both politicians and Churches need to "fight" together (cooperate to succeed).
- c) Ukraine: the Holy See insists on diplomacy and is always ready to engage in diplomacy with all parties. However, it is very hard to conduct negotiations if there are bombings during the talks. The space for negotiations is limited /small; nevertheless, everything must be done to reach an agreement.



MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP Lukas Mandl, MEP György Hölvényi, Card. Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, MEP Miriam Lexmann, MEP Željana Zovko, Former MEP Lorenzo Cesa

II. MEETING WITH CARD. MIGUEL ANGEL AYUSO GUIXOT, PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

- a) The key principles of Dialogue are Fraternity, Charity and Truth. Furthermore, Interreligious Dialogue has two main tracks, namely:
- Promote full citizenship; there should not be first and second class citizens
 - Defend and reinforce freedom of religion.
- b) Church proposes ideas and engages with laypersons. However, there is a fear to build a wall (“laicite” becomes laicism - meaning an ideology that closes the door for Dialogue. The cardinal appreciates the efforts of the EPP Group to conduct Dialogue with Churches and religious communities. Christian politicians and members of the clergy are citizens and believers. The overall aim is to build more cohesiveness in the society. Cohesion is a vital necessity today.
- c) Politicians should not only legislate but also reach out to religious leaders. Encountering each other irrespective of everyone’s differences, without interfering. For instance, legislating on counterterrorism is necessary but not sufficient; there is also the need to build closer links with local religious communities.



III. MEETING WITH MONS. RINO FISICHELLA, PRESIDENT OF PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING THE NEW EVANGELIZATION AND FORMER CHAPLAIN OF THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT

Mons. Graham Bell, Under-Secretary of the Council attended as well.

- a) Evangelization occupies the primary place in the life of the Church and in the everyday teaching of Pope Francis. The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization works to provide adequate responses for the Church in its missionary work of promoting and implementing the New Evangelization.
- b) The Church is facing a great challenge in the form of digital culture. In contrast with the past, when culture was limited to the geographical context one found themselves in, digital culture is inextricably linked to increased globalization and even has a role to play in shaping that globalisation. The various manifestations of the Church’s presence in the vast world of the internet is certainly a positive fact, but digital culture goes much further. It goes to the root of the anthropological question, which is decisive in every formative context.
- c) Pope Francis entrusted the coordination of the preparation for the 2025 Holy Year (Jubilee) to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. The motto for the Jubilee of 2025 is “Pilgrims of Hope. One of the priorities is the reception of pilgrims and faithful, as many as 30 - 35 million are expected in Rome during the Holy Year. Therefore, contacts with Rome’s Municipality, the Lazio Region and the Italian Government are underway so that everything unfolds with total security and in keeping with the capacity of hospitality that the city has always guaranteed.



Mons Bernard Munono, Sister Alessandra Smerilli, MEP Jan Olbrycht

IV. MEETING WITH MONS BERNARD MUNONO, DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT,

The recently appointed “ad interim” Secretary of the Dicastery, Sister Alessandra Smerilli welcomed the MEPs. Several experts of the Dicastery (responsible for migration, environment, security, international humanitarian law) attended the meeting.

- a) The Dicastery is one of the biggest organs in the Roman Curia. It serves Pope Francis by promoting the integral development of the person in light of the Gospel and in line with the Social Doctrine of the Church. It dedicates particular attention to taking care of the goods of justice, peace and the safeguarding of Creation, as well as issues regarding disarmament, human rights, human mobility, health and charitable works.
- b) By integrating, linking and promoting dialogue amongst the various social systems - such as economics, finance, employment, politics, culture - the Dicastery strives to make the social teachings of the Church known and put into practice.
- c) Within the Dicastery, there is a specific Section dedicated to migrants and refugees. It assists Pope Francis in the promotion and efficient action for the good of migrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking. It gathers information, gives scientific evaluations and theological studies on these matters, and collaborates with local Churches and Episcopal Conferences for coordinated action. The Section is placed under the Holy Father’s direction.



Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, MEP Antonio Tajani, MEP Jan Olbrycht, Romain Strasser, MEP Massimiliano Salini, Sabina Grzanka, Cesare Zucconi, Secretary General, Saint Egidio Community and his team

V. MEETING WITH CESARE ZUCCONI, SECRETARY GENERAL, SAINT EGIDIO COMMUNITY

Five other representatives of the Community also participated.

- a) Sant’Egidio was born in 1968, right after the second Vatican Council. With the years, it has become a network of communities in more than 70 countries of the world. The Community pays attention to the periphery and peripheral people. Prayer, poor and peace are indeed its fundamental points of reference.
- b) The representatives emphasised that the awareness and understanding that war is the source of all poverty has driven the Community to work for peace in the past decades. Fostering peace is a Christian responsibility, part of a bigger service of reconciliation. It is also part of the fraternity lived through ecumenical commitment and interreligious dialogue, in the “Spirit of Assisi”.
- c) The Communities of Sant’Egidio in Poland, Slovakia and Hungary are mobilised to help those who arrive from Ukraine, not only with necessities - food, warm clothes - but also by giving information on the right to humanitarian protection in the European Union.



Sister Helen Alford O.P, MEP Massimiliano Salini, MEP Željana Zovko

VI. MEETING WITH SISTER HELEN ALFORD O.P, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS (ALSO KNOWN AS THE ANGELICUM)

The rector, Fr. Thomas Joseph White OP, briefly welcomed the delegation.

- a) The Dominicans are trying to build a kind of “transversal knowledge” across the social sciences which connects with the social problems we face today, including the systemic problems of caring for our common home, climate change, social exclusion and inequality issues.
- b) Taking a cue from today’s society, many social relations are dominated by economic thought marked by an individualistic idea. To remedy this, we need a new way of thinking that brings back a sense of community that separates social thoughts from economics, because the most crucial factor in human happiness is the network of human relationships.
- c) About Ukraine: the second biggest group of foreign students at the Angelicum are Ukrainians. There are two types of humanitarian actions, which are essential: neutral action and supporting resistance. Solidarity is crucial and must be linked to resistance. The fear is that Kiev will become Aleppo or Grozny (massively damaged by bombings).

8 MARCH 2022

ROME

MEETING ON “FREEDOM OF RELIGION: PROTECTING THE ESSENCE OF HUMANITY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE EUROPE – NOW, AND FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME”

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairman of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Exchange of views with:
Mr. Jean-Paul Van De Walle, legal counsel, Europe, for ADF International in Belgium, advocating for religious freedom, life, and the family at the European Union.
3. Questions & Answers



The right to freedom of religion, enshrined in all major human rights treaties, continues to be regularly challenged, if not by States imposing undue restrictions to its exercise, then a by some advocating for its scope and importance to be narrowed down. The examples from real life stories that we heard, constitute tragic, yet precious reminders that discussions about the right to freedom of religion or belief are not merely theoretical.

ADF International’s lawyers and legal experts commit to be present for victims seeking justice as well as for policy makers at the highest international levels to offer their support. In this way, they will address the root causes, offering legal advice and analysis in the field of international and European human rights law and policy with a view to protecting fundamental freedoms and promoting the inherent dignity of all people.

Jean-Paul Van De Walle serves as Legal Counsel for ADF International in Brussels and shared more about the work this organisation is doing at global and EU level. He offered insights into how the EU could step up its protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief both inside and outside Europe.

5 APRIL 2022

STRASBOURG
EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ABOUT THE ON THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE
WITH H.E. ELDER METROPOLITAN EMMANUEL OF CHALCEDON

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Exchange of views about the ongoing situation in Ukraine with:
H.E. Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon (via video connection from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul)
3. Questions & Answers



MEP György Hölvényi, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP Pernille Weiss



His Eminence Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon (Adamakis) pointed out that the architect and “the one who saw how topical it was to move on to the issue of the autocephaly of the Church of Ukraine was the Patriarch himself. I was just a deacon who followed orders I received, it was not my own initiative.”

He added that before the granting of the Autocephaly, there were various stages of communication and preparation, and the unification council was convened on December 15, 2018, in which the Bishops who were under the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine were invited to participate. The Ecumenical Patriarchate sent out invitations to everyone.



“The Ecumenical Patriarchate did not exclude Moscow, they wanted me to stay out of it. Not everyone, however, there were some who wanted to, others who prevented them at the last minute, finally there were two Metropolitans who were in the united council. The Russian Church and the Moscow Patriarchate wanted to turn a blind eye. But seeing a church that had already advanced, we could not have 45 million believers who were asking for their autocephaly from the Moscow Patriarchate and ignore it.”

Metropolitan Elder Chalcedon also noted that the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not do anything non-canonical, it was within its jurisdiction, because the Mother Church grants the autocephaly, from this Mother Church they took the autocephaly and the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Patriarchate of Serbia and the Patriarchates of Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and all the autocephalous churches. “The Patriarchate cut off its territory from time to time to make autocephalous churches,” he said characteristically.

Regarding the interruption of the commemoration of the Ecumenical Patriarch by the Patriarchate of Moscow, Metropolitan Emmanuel said that “the Patriarch doesn’t lose nothing, they are the ones who lose by being cut off from the body of the church. The Orthodox Church is not a system of federal churches, they are connected by the Ecumenical Patriarch. When you cut the commemoration of the Ecumenical Patriarch, how do you connect with the other churches? How do you communicate with the other churches? This is an issue they may not even have understood themselves. It is very easy to say “we are cutting the commemoration because there is a schism”, we never considered that we have a schism with Moscow, we do not have a real issue for which to create a schism”.

He is optimistic that there are still possibilities to get things into a dialogue.

EPP Group Conference



EPP WORKING GROUP
INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:
**Islam in Central
& Eastern Europe**

Hosted by MEPs
Jan Olbrycht and **György Hölvényi**
Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group
on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Wednesday 18 May 2022, 16:30 - 18:00 CET
European Parliament, Brussels, Spinelli 5H1

Registration: EPP-Interreligious@europarl.europa.eu

18 MAY 2022

BRUSSELS
CONFERENCE ON "ISLAM IN CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE"

PROGRAMME

- 16.30 - 16.45 **WELCOME ADDRESSES**
György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
- 16.45 - 17.00 **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**
Prof. Marek Moroń, Lecturer at the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University
- 17.00 - 17.30 **INTERVENTIONS**
Dr Dzevada Susko, Chief-of-Office International Cooperation, Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and University professor for International Relations
Dr Zorina Kanapatskaya, Islamic studies scholar at the National Pedagogical University in Minsk
Dr Oleg Yarosh, Scholar at National Academy of Science of Ukraine (via video connection from Ukraine)
- 17.30 - 18.00 **QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**



Islam in Central, South and Eastern Europe –is a large subject which includes all the Muslim communities living in that region.

Islam of Muslim communities living here for hundreds of years, Islam which has its own cultural characteristics, and which makes the European Muslims a natural participant of the European way of life. It is not any kind of different Islam in terms of sacrum, but it is Islam with European cultural face and features.

The Muslims of Belarus, Bosnia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Albania, Turkey and other countries are part of Europe for at least 600 years.

A question of integration of these Muslims in Europe does not arise at all. Such subject in case of European Islam simply does not exist. It is also difficult to imagine young generation or future generations of European Muslims in our countries, seeking to return to their roots and origins. Their roots and origins are European for hundreds of years. These are important matters which we all know but perhaps these issues are not adequately addressed when we are trying to involve European Islam in the future of our shared Europe of XXI century.

It is also to be noted that not much attention is drawn to European Islam. They live a normal life. We may find sometimes reports and films presenting Muslims of European Islam as an exotic component of ethnic and social tapestry in their countries, but European Islam is not exotic.

Islam is considered by many as a foreign body in Europe which somehow has to be dealt with in order to avoid turmoil. The main idea and target being perhaps that Muslims have to be integrated. This is a misguided notion as most European Muslims have their roots in Europe for many centuries.

Muslims in Central and Eastern Europe have practiced not just in the form of public relations meetings and declarations but as everyday life for generations with Christian and Jewish neighbors. There is a great purpose and weight in religious dialogue in the field of values and human brotherhood. A cornerstone of this dialogue must be accepting the other side as equal not only in terms of being equal humans but in terms of being equal in the way they do Sacrum. Your religion for you, my religion for me as God says in Sura 119.ayat 6. That subject may be widely debated in the context of Encyclica Fratelli Tutti of October 2020, document Dominus Iesus of August 2000 and the The Abu Dhabi document of February 2019.

7 JUNE 2022

STRASBOURG
MEETING ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS
AS THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Exchange of views about the Empowerment of persecuted Christians as the most vulnerable people:
 - **Ms Marcela Szymanski**, Editor in Chief and Head of the EU Office, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)
 - **Mr José Luis Bazán**, Legal Advisor, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)
3. Questions & Answers



Each individual State has the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In addition, the international community is called upon to take collective action through appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other peaceful means to help to protect populations from those crimes. Concerning Christian communities that are victims of atrocity crimes, more should be done, including prevention and prosecution of the perpetrators, capacity building and preservation of criminal evidences, empowering association of victims, promoting academic and field research, articulating a coalition of states internationally to denounce the crimes. The EU could also use other tools such as the GSP scheme and the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.



The threat to the survival of some of the world's oldest Christian communities has significantly deepened. The decline is most marked in Syria where, within a decade, Christians have plummeted from 1.5 million (10 percent of the population) in 2011, before the war began, to perhaps 300,000 (less than two percent of the population). In the aftermath of the August 4, 2020, Beirut explosions, where the greatest impact was felt in the Christian Quarter, Lebanon's Church leaders questioned the community's long-term survival. In Iraq, where the rate of exodus is much slower, the community is down from perhaps 300,000 before the 2014 Daesh invasion, to as few as 150,000 in spring 2022. ACN research showed that in parts of Iraq where Christians had been a strong minority, such as the capital Baghdad, the community was a shadow of itself, with churches struggling to stay open. However, of the seven Middle Eastern countries, only Iraq was the one to see an improvement.



EPP WORKING GROUP
INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:

**Exchange with representatives of Churches
and Religious communities on the**

Outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Hosted by MEPs
Jan Olbrycht and **György Hölvényi**
Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group
on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Wednesday 22 June 2022, 16:30 - 18:00
European Parliament, Brussels,
room Altiero Spinelli 5H1

Please register **by Friday 17 June 2022** at: EPP-Interreligious@europarl.europa.eu

WEDNESDAY, 22 JUNE 2022

BRUSSELS
"OUTCOME OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE"

PROGRAMME

16.30 - 16.40

WELCOME ADDRESSES

- Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**

16.40 - 16.45

STATEMENTS BY:

- **Mr. Othmar Karas MEP**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for Art. 17 of the Lisbon Treaty

16.45 - 17.30

INTERVENTIONS:

- **Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto**, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)
- **Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen**, General Secretary of Conference of European Churches (CEC) (via video connection)
- **Very Reverend Archimandrite Fr. Aimilianos Bogiannou**, Director of the Brussels Office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (CROCEU)
- **H.E. Ambassador Mrs. Ismat Jahan**, Permanent Observer of the OIC Mission to the EU (via video connection)
- **Rabbi Avi Tawil**, Director, European Jewish Community Centre

17.30 - 18.00

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

18.00

END OF CONFERENCE



FVP Othmar Karas, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP György Hölvényi

The aim of the Conference on the Outcome of the CoFoE was to discuss, together with high-level guests representing different religions within the European Union, the result of the CoFoE, as well as the expectations of Churches and religious communities from the implementation of its outcome.

- **Mr. Othmar Karas MEP**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for Art. 17 of the Lisbon Treaty

The intervention of Mr. Karas focused on the importance of the connection between religions and democracy. In this sense, he stated that the implementation of the result of the CoFoE and the Interreligious Dialogue (Article 17) are a package. The EU is the answer to antisemitism, populism, nationalism and the future of the religions is strongly linked to the future of democracies.

The role of the religions of the European Union is crucial in order to strengthen the EU democracy. As a matter of fact, without understanding the religious dimension, we would not be able to fully understand the current challenges of the world, including the war in Ukraine.

All religions in Europe are not doing enough and are not united enough in the political debate.

At the moment, everything is overshadowed by Russia's aggression to Ukraine. The European Union must support Ukraine and its religious communities, which belong to the EU.

The key lesson from the world is that we have to learn to better defend ourselves. Churches should play an important role to strengthen the EU democracy. In order to fight for the future of the EU together, it is crucial to find a common ground between the EU and the different European religions.

- **Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto**, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)

According to Fr. Prieto, the outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe cannot be reduced to the final report drafted and presented at the end of the Conference. The real outcome will be the implementation of the final report. Speaking of outcome now can be premature, since the CoFoE is still a work in progress.

Fr. Prieto proceeded by analysing the idea and structure of the Conference of the Future of Europe, as well as its outcome.

- > **Idea**: The idea of involving the citizens is an exercise of participative democracy that compliments the citizens and increases their involvement in the EU. This conference was a very good idea.
- > **Structure**: multilingual platform, panel of citizens, conference plenary and final report. The designer of the Conference was very creative. However, the participation from member states was not homogeneous. In some member states it was not well publicised. Article 17 partners (including COMECE) have complained that they were not invited to be part of the plenary, and that was discrimination.
- > **Final report**: the 49 proposals are very concrete. COMECE has organised events to discuss them, but the important thing is the implementation of these proposals.

- **Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen**, General Secretary of Conference of European Churches (CEC) (via video connection)

Dr Sørensen focused his speech on the cooperation between the EU and the CEC for the implementation of the outcome of the CoFoE.

CEC appreciates the initiative to give more democratic power to European citizens. CEC was one of the first to mobilise when the CoFoE was announced. At the same time, they encouraged the Churches to take part in the debate. The final report is a catalogue of good ideas that will support a democratic and just Europe. European societies are moving towards an increasingly secular nature, and this is a challenge to all the faith-based organisations. Due to a growing religious illiteracy, religion is regarded with suspicion. For this reason, non involving the Churches and the faith-based organisations in the CoFoE was a mistake.

Article 17 is a fundamental toolbox for both the European Union and the religious communities, because it enhances dialogue and respect of all religions. However, it would be a pity to reduce Article 17 to merely religious speeches: it should instead provide for an active participation of the Churches in the European political context. The CoFoE was one the main tools in the Article 17 toolbox. CEC and COMECE look forward to work with the EU to implement the outcome of the CoFoE.

- **Very Reverend Archimandrite Fr. Aimilianos Bogiannou**, Director of the Brussels Office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (CROCEU)

Father Bogiannou's intervention highlighted the importance of education in order to raise awareness among younger generations on the power of European citizens.

In response to Vice-President Karas' statement according to which Churches are not active enough in the political debate, Fr Amilianos underlined the fact that often the Church does not get involved in the initiatives of the EU, and this makes participation difficult.

It is important to use education in order to raise awareness, especially among the younger generations, of the possibilities for citizens to express their thoughts and opinions about the functioning of the EU and its institutions. Young people will then use social media to share their knowledge and experiences. Then thinking about the future of Europe, we should ask ourselves: how can the concept of the European family be strengthened in the mind of the generations to come?

- **H.E. Ambassador Mrs. Ismat Jahan**, Permanent Observer of the OIC Mission to the EU

Ambassador Jahan underlined the crucial role of respect and inclusion among different religions. The discourse on the future of Europe aims at promoting Christian values, but also at increasing tolerance towards diversity of religion and thought.

The role of Churches and religion communities as agents for social inclusion is vital today. Promotion of cultural and religious pluralism, mutual understanding and respect for diversity and social inclusivity are priorities for the OIC, which is happy that the CoFoE tackled these issues. However, the OIC is concerned about the raising hate towards Muslims in Europe and all over the world. There is a need to reflect on the past: to know your future you must know your past. In order to have a better future and to implement the report of the CoFoE, mutual respect, trust and mutual understanding among the political and religious institutions is fundamental. Cultural and religious diversities can live in peace and harmony if we can manage to transform the differences in respect, and not only in tolerance.

- **Rabbi Avi Tawil**, Director, European Jewish Community Centre

Rabbi Tawil's speech focused on the importance of inclusion and of always being aware of the reality of society.

When the CoFoE started, the idea of having a war in the European continent was unthinkable. Too quick, we learned that the nature of the world did not change, and the discussion on the future of Europe became more important than ever. Europe is a project for everyone, and we should realize that there should always be place for the "other". As mentioned by Vice-President Karas, it is crucial that religions play a bigger role in the political debate.

- Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP**

The final remarks of the two Co-Chairmen of the Working Group underlined the importance of Article 17 and of religion in order to fully understand the current social challenges.

According to Mr. Olbrycht, the positive side of not being included in the CoFoE is that Churches were not treated as NGOs.

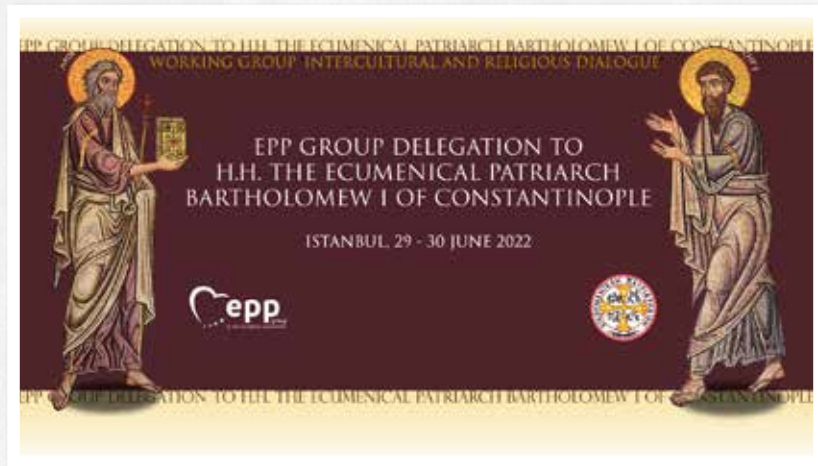
Moreover, when looking at the final report of the CoFoE, there are several missing elements, among which the question of whether Churches should act through their believers, or enter directly in the political debate. Churches will surely act through their believers, but there are some problems today that cannot be understood without taking into account the religious situations. For instance, the reality of the war in Ukraine cannot be fully comprehended without being aware of the situation of the Orthodox Church. Finally, when democracy is discussed, freedom of religion should always be included.

- Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**

Mr Hölvényi stated that the absence of certain elements about freedom of religion within the final report of the CoFoE is mainly due to indifference. This indifference, however, can and should be tackled through a correct implementation of Article 17.



Rabbi Avi Tawil, Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, Fr. Aimilianos Bogiannou



29 - 30 JUNE 2022

ISTANBUL

VISIT TO THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I. OF CONSTANTINOPLE

A delegation of the European People's Party (EPP), consisting of the MEPs Jan Olbrycht, György Hölvényi, Othmar Karas, Antonio Tajani, Evangelos Meimarakis and Ivan Štefanec, visited the Phanar on Thursday, June 30, 2022, and was warmly welcomed by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

During the meeting, the members of the European Parliament, who participate in the EPP Working Group on Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, had the opportunity to discuss with the Patriarch issues of mutual interest, with a particular focus on the ongoing war in Ukraine and its tragic consequences.

The Patriarch reminded his interlocutors that the First-Throne Church of Constantinople has from the very first moment condemned Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine, an independent and sovereign state of Europe, and called for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful settlement of the critical situation through sincere dialogue, which is the only means of resolving every problem and addressing every dispute.

The meeting was also attended by Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon, who for more than three decades has been in charge of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's cooperation with the European Institutions, and the Grand Ecclesiarch Aetios, Director of the Ecumenical Patriarch's Private Office.*



MEP Evangelos Meimarakis, MEP György Hölvényi, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP Antonio Tajani, H.H. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I., FVP Othmar Karas, MEP Ivan Štefanec, Romain Strasser, Josefina Pelaez

Romain Strasser, MEP György Hölvényi, MEP Evangelos Meimarakis, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP Ivan Štefanec, MEP Antonio Tajani, FVP Othmar Karas

* This article was published in the Orthodox Times:
<https://orthodoxtimes.com/a-delegation-of-the-european-peoples-party-visited-the-ecumenical-patriarch/>

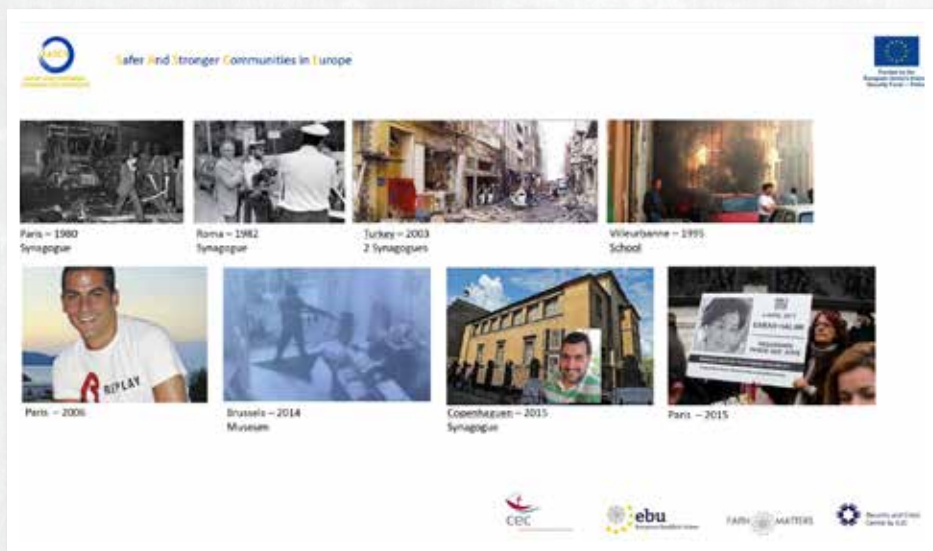
5 JULY 2022

STRASBOURG

THE PROTECTION AND RELIANCE OF THE PLACES OF WORSHIP

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP
2. Presentation and exchange of views about the Protection and reliance of the Places of Worship with:
 - **Ms Elizabeta Kitanović**, Executive Secretary for Human Rights, Conference of European Churches (CEC)
 - **Mr Elie Kagan**, Head of Crisis Management at the Security and Crisis Centre (SACC) by the European Jewish Congress (EJC)
3. Questions & Answers



During the EPP Working Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue meeting of 5 July, the two distinguished speakers gave a complete overview of the Safer And Stronger Communities in Europe (SASCE) Project.

The SASCE project is a multi-layered approach aiming to increase security in and around places of worship, as well as within and between Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Jewish communities. Indeed, SASCE involves many European member states and is the result of a partnership between the Conference of European Churches, Faith Matters, the European Buddhist Union and the Security and Crisis Center by the European Jewish Congress.

The terrorist attacks of the past few years in Europe have triggered legal challenges in the area of Freedom of Religion and Belief across the member states of the EU. This, in turn, has brought to current episodes of intolerance and disrespect towards religious communities and their respective places of worship.

In this context, for the first time, representatives of the four faith communities in Europe decided to work together on a common project, funded by the European Commission, to enhance security. As part of this initiative, the four partner organizations developed tools to strengthen security awareness and crisis management. These tools are disseminated by a network of ambassadors through trainings and briefings for religious communities, as well as through wider communication campaigns.

One of the main concrete tools developed by the SASCE Consortium is the monthly report, which has the aim of increasing awareness and understanding the major developments in terrorism, counterterrorism, threats and hostility directed towards the four communities across Europe. The goal of this report is to provide religious communities with basic means of security for their Places of Worship, mainly through videos, posters and guides.

Finally, the Consortium is positive that, by raising awareness of the potential threats (social media abuse, harassment, violent assault, etc.), worshippers will have better crisis management abilities; they will keep reporting every abuse suffered and law enforcement will be strengthened.

EPP Group Conference

European Parliament

epp
group
in the european parliament

EPP WORKING GROUP
INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:

**Exchange of views on
Croats and other Catholics
in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
Socio-political challenges
of a community in decline**

Hosted by MEP **Jan Olbrycht** Co-Chairman
of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural
and Religious Dialogue
with **Željana Zovko** MEP
Don Željko Majić, Director of Caritas in Mostar

Wednesday 7 September 2022, 08:00 - 09:00
European Parliament, Brussels,
PHS 12th floor restaurant

7 SEPTEMBER 2022

BRUSSELS
**CROATS AND OTHER CATHOLICS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:
SOCIO- POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF A COMMUNITY IN DECLINE**

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Exchange of views on “Croats and other Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Socio-political challenges of a community in decline” with:
 - **Ms. Željana Zovko MEP**
 - **Don Željko Majić**, Director of Caritas in Mostar
3. Questions & Answers



MEP György Hölvényi, Don Željko Majić, MEP Željana Zovko, MEP Karlo Ressler, MEP Tomislav Sokol

Hosted by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP and Mr György Hölvényi MEP with Ms. Željana Zovko MEP and Don Željko Majić, Director of Caritas in Mostar. Participants included Ms Rasa Juknevičienė MEP, Mr Karlo Ressler MEP, Mr Tomislav Sokol MEP and Mr Francisco Javier Zarzalejos MEP as well as Ms Ines Domitrović, Counsellor, Permanent Representation of Croatia to the European Union, Ms Floriana Ambrosca, Nonciature Apostolique auprès de l'UE and Mr Slavko Vukadin, Journalist from Croatia.

The event was opened by the Co-Chair of the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Mr. Olbrycht MEP. Afterwards Ms. Zovko MEP provided introductory remarks on the topic which was followed by the speech of the main speaker Don Željko Majić, Director of Caritas in Mostar and led to a debate amongst the participants. Afterwards, an exchange of views took place between the speaker and the Members of the European Parliament



12 OCTOBER 2022

BRUSSELS

THE SITUATION OF CONTINUED BRUTAL KILLINGS AND DISPLACEMENT OF CHRISTIAN FARMERS BY ISLAMIST HERDSMEN IN THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MAKURDI AND OTHER PARTS OF NIGERIA

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairman of the Working Group **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Exchange of views with **H.E. Wilfred Anagbe**, Catholic Bishop of Makurdi, Nigeria on **the situation of continued brutal killings and displacement of Christian farmers by Islamist herdsmen in the Catholic diocese of Makurdi and other parts of Nigeria**
3. Questions & Answers



MEP Milan Zver, MEP Lukas Mandl, Marcela Szymanski, MEP Jan Olbrycht, H.E. Mons. Wilfred Anagbe, Rev. Fr Remigius Shawon Ihyula

The situation in Benue State, one of the central states of Nigeria:

(a) In the past 3 months, 36 attacks were reported, including the murder of numerous citizens, as well as the destruction of countless houses and schools. 1.7 million citizens are on the move, in search of security and shelter.

(b) The conflict is certainly religious, as priests and monks have been persecuted, kidnapped and killed. In addition, several churches have been destroyed.

(c) High levels of malnutrition have been reported, as farmers cannot harvest due to security issues and lack of land ownership (land property does not exist in Nigeria).

(d) Emergency items and other supplies are required: food, blankets, first aid medication, shelter, temporary infrastructures - for instance to serve as schools for kids - and learning materials. Vulnerability assessments are being put into practice for a more appropriate resources distribution - however they are not sufficient for the high demand.

(e) Children are having poor access to education. Without investments in securing their education, their future employment opportunities will be low, and the consequent perpetuation of violence may become a reality, where trauma, miseducation and a lack of professional prospects prevail. School activities alongside trauma healing activities must be organized.

KEY MESSAGES

(1) The Church representatives ask for the European Union's support because - unlike the issue of the attacks of Boko Haram in other parts of Nigeria - the conflict in Benue State is not reported abroad.

(2) They appeal for Nigeria's situation to be taken seriously, and call on both the Parliament and the Commission to take concrete action in the following ways:

- The presence of a new special envoy would be needed to target the issue. While there is an EU Special Envoy for the Sahel region, however, Nigeria is not covered. Additionally, the highly anticipated appointment of EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief is not happened yet.
- The swift organisation of a promised fact-finding mission is necessary, because it has unfortunately been postponed for the first half of 2023.
- As the support of the Nigerian Government is insufficient, and the soon to be held elections will be "turbulent", European aid to Nigeria is of extreme importance. Therefore, MEPs can play a vital role in getting support in various forms, including from pressuring the Commission to take action to raise awareness about the situation in the appropriate international platforms (ACP).

Fundacja im. bp. Tadeusza Pieronka
Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation
fundacja.pieronek@gmail.com



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIANS IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION



WAR IN EUROPE - WHAT THE EUROPEAN UNION WILL BE LIKE?

21-22 OCTOBER 2022

Krzysztofory Palace
31-011 Krakow, Main Square 35

www.kosciol-europa.org.pl

Organizer:
Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation

Co-organizers:
Robert Schuman Foundation in Luxembourg
European People's Party Group in the European Parliament
Polish Delegation in the EPP in the EP
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)

Simultaneous translation:
English, German, Polish

WSPÓŁPRACA



FRIDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2022 KRZYSZTOFORY PALACE, MAIN SQUARE 35

- 10.00 – 11.30** **REGISTRATION**
- 11.15 – 12.00** **WELCOME:**
Michał Góra PhD, Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation, President
- OPENING:**
Jan Olbrycht PhD, EPP Group in the European Parliament, Vice-president
Andrzej Halicki, Polish Delegation in the EPP in the European Parliament, President
Ria Oomen-Ruijten, Robert Schuman Foundation, President
Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto PhD, COMECE, Secretary General
- 12.00 – 12.30** **WAR IN EUROPE – WHAT THE EUROPEAN UNION WILL BE LIKE?**
Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
- 12.30 – 14.30** **I SESSION:**
CHURCHES' ATTITUDES TO THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
Panelists:
Fr. Prof. Marek Blaza SI, Catholic Academy in Warsaw
Fr. Ihor Shaban PhD, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Archieparchy of Kyiv
Abp. Evstachij Zoria, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Eparchy of Chernihiv
Moderator: **Marcin Przciszewski**, KAI, President and Editor in Chief
- 14.30 – 15.30** **LUNCH**
- 15.30 – 17.30** **II SESSION:**
SPHERE OF COMMUNICATION AS A BATTLEGROUND
Panelists:
Martyna Bildziukiewicz PhD, East StratCom Task Force, Director
Anna Mierzyńska, social media analyst
Robert Pszczel, former director of the NATO Information Office in Moscow
Miriam Lexmann, Member of the European Parliament (Slovakia) (tbc)
Moderator: **Kazimierz Sowa**, Publicist
- 18.00** **HOLY MASS, SAINTS PETER AND PAUL CHURCH, 54 GRODZKA STREET**

- 19.00** **BP TADEUSZ PIERONEK'S "IN VERITATE" AWARD CEREMONY – FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS IN COMBINING CHRISTIAN AND EUROPEAN VALUES:**
Laureate A.D. 2022:
EPIFANIUSZ, Supreme Head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan of Kyiv (Eulogy by **Amb. Jan Tombiński**)
Hanna MACHIŃSKA PhD, deputy of the Polish Ombudsman (Eulogy by **Fr. Prof. Alfred Wierzbicki**)

SATURDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2022 KRZYSZTOFORY PALACE, MAIN SQUARE 35

- 9.00 – 9.30** **REGISTRATION**
- 9.30 – 12.00** **III SESSION:**
HOW THE MIGRATION PROCESSES CHANGE THE EUROPEAN UNION?
INTRODUCTION:
Margaritis Schinas, Vicepresident of the European Commission, Promoting our European Way of Life (tbc)
Panelists:
Elmar Brok, Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Berlin
Ludger Möllers, Schwäbische Zeitung, journalist (tbc)
Janina Ochojska, Member of the European Parliament (Poland)
Abp. Youssef Antoine Soueif PhD, Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli (Lebanon)
Moderator: **Dominika Szczawińska**, Radio eM, Journalist
- 12.30 – 14.30** **IV SESSION:**
WHAT ABOUT THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION?
Panelists:
Iulian Groza, The Institute for European Policies and Reforms, Executive Director (Moldova)
Rasa Juknevičienė, Member of the European Parliament (Lithuania)
Bp. Ladislav Némec SVD, Diocese of Zrenjanin (Serbia), Vice President of the CCEE
Amb. Jan Tombiński, EU High-Level Adviser to the Government of the Republic of Moldova
Moderator: **Maciej Zakrocki**, Radio TOK FM, Journalist
- 14.30 – 14.45** **CONCLUSION AND CLOSING:**
Rafał Budnik, Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation, Vice-president
- 15.00** **LUNCH**



Archbishop Yevstraty Zoria, Ambassador Jan Tombiński, MEP Jan Olbrycht, Michał Góra

On October 21 and 22, the twenty-second event in the cycle took place. The first event of this kind was organised by Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek and his associates in 2001. This year, due to the extremely difficult political situation in Europe, the conference adopted the theme: "War in Europe - What the European Union will be like?" The sessions and accompanying meetings were held, as always, in Krakow in two very charming spaces located on Krakow's Main Market Square: in the Krzysztofory Palace (the copper room) and in the Sukiennice (Gallery of Painting of the 19th and 20th centuries - National Museum in Krakow).

At its busiest there were approximately 240 guests present. Among them, it is worth mentioning, eminent figures from the European Parliament, the highest representatives of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as well as people related to European sciences, media experts, journalists, analysts (especially those dealing with disinformation issues), politicians from the EPP political group, diplomats, local government officials, clergymen from different denominations. A significant number of guests came from Poland, but many people came also from Ukraine, Germany and Central European countries.

The event consisted of: two speeches by special guests, four thematic sessions and an evening gala of the bishop Pieronek, funded by associates of Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, who died four years ago. Each of the sessions attracted a large group of interested parties. Of particular interest were the speeches of the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, who appeared at the conference for the second time, and the Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr. Margalitis Schinas (online). There were between 70 and 220 listeners participating in sessions. Thematic sessions were devoted to the following issues: "Churches' attitudes to the Russian aggression against Ukraine", "The sphere of communication as a battleground", "How the migration processes change Europe" and "What about the enlargement of the European Union?".

A special moment was the award ceremony of the Bp Tadeusz Pieronek IN VERITATE, which is given for "outstanding attitude and achievements in combining Christian and European values in public life". It was the fourth edition of this award, the name of which refers directly to the bishop's call and the maxim that guided the creator of these events in his life. This year, the interiors of the gallery in Sukiennice witnessed the awarding of symbolic, bronze IN VERITATE statuettes to two people who themselves "are" symbols of the current time of unrest in Europe: Metropolitan Epiphanius - head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Ms. Hanna Machińska - deputy Ombudsman.

The entire conference was web streamed and available on the Internet in real time (Bishop T. Pieronek Foundation website, facebook, youtube), and is constantly available in three languages (Polish, German, English). A short overview and information film was also made of the event.

In addition to the main organizer - Bp Tadeusz Pieronek's Foundation - the following contributed to the event: European People's Party Group in the European Parliament, Polish Delegation in the EPP Fraction, Robert Schuman Foundation in Luxembourg, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, COMECE.



25 OCTOBER 2022

BRUSSELS
PODCAST RECORDING: INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:
WHY IT MATTERS?



<https://twitter.com/EPPGroup/status/1589898058518732802>

The podcast covered:

- The spirit of Dialogue: Promote mutual understanding and an active sense of European citizenship to live peacefully together.
- Distinctiveness: No other political group in the European Parliament runs a similar permanent structure. (The Lisbon Treaty's Article 17 lays down the legal basis for the dialogue and encourages politicians, religious leaders and experts to strive for more cooperation).
- The ultimate goal of the EPP Group 'Intercultural and Religious Dialogue': is to assist in the important effort to pursue intercultural exchange, people to people dialogue, peace-building initiatives and the strengthening of social cohesion. The dialogue is a powerful tool to bring this about and the EPP Group is a key player in such exchanges.
- A comparative perspective of the Art.17 Dialogue of the EP and the EPP Group's Dialogue with Churches and religious institutions.

9 NOVEMBER 2022

BRUSSELS
MEETING WITH MEDIA ON
WHY THE EPP GROUP IS INVESTING IN INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Presentation and exchange of views on “Why the EPP Group is investing in Intercultural and Religious Dialogue?”
3. Questions & Answers





MEP Miriam Lexmann, MEP Željana Zovko, MEP György Hölvényi, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP Michael Gahler

The EPP Group's Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue pays considerable attention to how its work is portrayed in the national and international (Brussels based) media. In this framework the Co-Chairs of the WG Jan Olbrycht and György Hölvényi organised a working meeting with representatives of media in Brussels on 9 November with participation of MEPs from different Members States namely, Zeljana Zovko, Miriam Lexmann and Michael Gahler. The exchange of views with journalists focused on why the EPP Group is investing in intercultural and Religious Dialogue. The main subjects such as War in Ukraine, Role of Church in modern society, and the post of the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief which is an important position that has made visible the violations of religious freedom in different regions around the world, were addressed by journalists during the meeting. EPP Group Members voiced their strong criticism toward the statements and behaviour of Cyril, Patriarch of Moscow blessing the war in Ukraine.

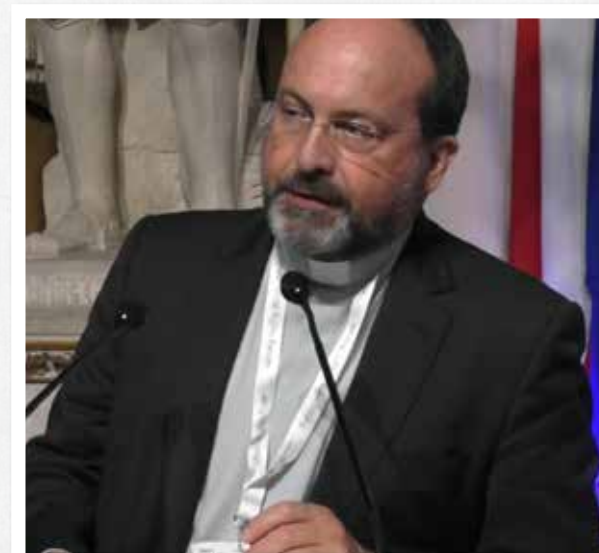
The EPP Group wishes to continue these meeting with media representatives on a regular basis.

23 NOVEMBER 2022

STRASBOURG
MEETING WITH FR. MANUEL BARRIOS PRIETO, GENERAL SECRETARY, COMMISSION
OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF THE EU (COMECE) ON ISSUES OF COMMON
INTEREST

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Exchange of views with **Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto**, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE) on issues of common interest
3. Questions & Answers



The Secretary General of COMECE, Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto discussed with the MEPs of the Working Group the war in Ukraine, the situation of religious minorities in China, the issues of Food Security and the EU Special envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

29 NOVEMBER 2022

BRUSSELS
MEETING WITH H.E. ARCHBISHOP BERNARD BOBER,
NEWLY APPOINTED CHAIR OF THE SLOVAK BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

AGENDA

1. Opening by **Ms. Miriam Lexmann MEP**
2. Exchange of views with:
H.E. Archbishop Bernard Bober, Chair of the Slovak Bishop' Conference
3. Questions & Answers



MEP Peter Pollak, MEP Miriam Lexmann, H.E. Archbishop Bernard Bober, EPP Group Chairman Weber, MEP Lukas Mandl

The aim of the delegation's visit was to meet EU decision-makers to strengthen the dialogue in light of their commonly shared Judeo-Christian heritage and to discuss how the Church contributes to addressing the current challenges facing Europe, including the social-economic consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, supporting the vulnerable fleeing Russia's aggression, and defending peace, security and the values and principles on which our Union was founded.

9 - 10 DECEMBER 2022

VIENNA
XXIV ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE
WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

RELIGION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Reaction of Churches and religious communities to war, conflict and their contribution in shaping the evolution of the European Union

PROGRAMME

FRIDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2022

- 10:30 **REGISTRATION FOR EXTERNAL SPEAKERS, GUESTS AND JOURNALISTS**
- 11:00 - 11:30 **WELCOME**
- **Othmar KARAS MEP**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for implementation of Article 17 TFEU Dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations
 - **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chairman and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chairman of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue
 - **György HÖLVÉNYI MEP**, Co-Chairman of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue
- 11:30 - 12:30 **SPECIAL INTERVENTIONS**
- **H.E. Elder Metropolitan EMMANUEL OF CHALCEDON**, Ecumenical Patriarchate (via interactio)
 - **Fr. Manuel Enrique BARRIOS PRIETO**, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)
 - **Chief Rabbi Schlomo HOFMEISTER**, Community Rabbi of Vienna
 - **Imam Yahya Sergio Yahe PALLAVICINI**, President, European Muslim Leaders Council (EULEMA)
- DEBATE**
- 12:30 - 14:30 **LUNCH AT HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL VIENNA - RESTAURANT PARLOR**

14:30- 16:00 **THEME I: THE CHURCHES AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

Panel Chair:

Rasa JUKNEVIČIENĖ MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the EP

- **Rabbi Lévi MATUSOF**, Director of the European Jewish Public Affairs and EU Representative of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine
- **H.E. ARSENIUS KARDAMAKIS** of Austria, Metropolitan of the Metropolis of Austria and Exarch of Hungary and Central Europe
- **Dr. Jørgen Skov SØRENSEN**, General Secretary at Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- **Prof. Antoine ARJAKOVSKY**, Historian, Co-directeur, Department of Research "Politique et Religions", Collège des Bernardins

DEBATE

16:30 **STUDY VISIT TO THE KLOSTERNEUBURG ABBEY**

20:00 **DINNER AT THE LEOPOLD RESTAURANT OF THE KLOSTERNEUBURG ABBEY**



SATURDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2022

07:45 (OPTIONAL) MEETING AT THE HOTEL LOBBY AND WALK TO THE STEPHANSDOM

08:00 - 09:00 (OPTIONAL PROGRAMME) HOLY MASS AT THE STEPHANSDOM CELEBRATED BY FR. PETER SCHIPKA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE AUSTRIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

10:00 - 11:30 **THEME II: INFLUENCE OF CHURCHES/RELIGIONS ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES?**

Panel Chair:

Pernille WEISS MEP, Head of the Danish Delegation of the EPP Group

- **Prof. Dr. Christiaan Alting von GEUSAU**, President of the Vienna-based International Catholic Legislators' Network and Professor of Law and Education at ITI Catholic University
- **Very Reverend Archimandrite Father Aimilianos BOGIANNOU**, Committee of Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the EU (CROCEU)
- **Prof. Dr. Regina POLAK**, Associate Professor at the Department of Practical Theology, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Vienna

DEBATE

11:30 - 12:00 **CLOSING**

- **Othmar KARAS MEP**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for implementation of Article 17 TFEU Dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations
- **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chairman and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chairman of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue

12:00 **LUNCH AT HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL VIENNA - RESTAURANT PARLOR**



FVP Othmar Karas, Yabya Sergio Yabe Pallavicini, MEP Jan Olbrycht, MEP György Hölvényi, Chief Rabbi Schlomo Hofmeister, Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto



The annual meeting of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue of the EPP Group in the European Parliament took place in Vienna.

First Vice-President Karas affirmed that without interreligious dialogue, no democratic majorities are possible for a prosperous future in Europe and lamented that the Union's foundation of values had been shaken by the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine. Societies were increasingly divided, he said, and religious communities were also regrettably involved in this. The ÖVP politician referred to the inglorious role of Moscow Patriarch Cyril as a representative of a church that allowed itself to be instrumentalized by Putin. This in particular should be an incentive to strengthen interreligious dialogue - as the European People's Party is doing in Vienna for the 24th time.

Othmar Karas, who as Vice-President of the EU Parliament is entrusted with the implementation of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which provides a legal obligation for an open, transparent and regular dialogue of the EU with religious communities, acknowledged the importance of interreligious dialogue in his introduction. Without it, he said, there would be no democratic majorities for a prosperous future for Europe. Religion, origin and language are essential elements to implement the EU's claim to be "united in diversity". Mr Karas condemned any policy that seeks to distinguish itself by accusingly pointing the finger at religion.

The representative of the Catholic Church on the podium, COMECE Secretary General Prieto, quoted from a speech by the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, Archbishop Aldo Giordano, who died about a year ago, according to which the question of God is a crucial one for the future of the continent. Without transcendence, there is a threat of "anarchic pluralism" in which man sets himself absolute. Faith in God, on the other hand, is in contradiction to authoritarian regimes. And as a common obligation for the religious communities, Prieto named that of acting as "peacemakers" and thus concretizing the "unique mediator role of Europe" in the conflict of competing world powers. A credible commitment to peace and reconciliation would also inspire young people anew for the Union, the COMECE representative was convinced.

In his statement, Rabbi Hofmeister warned against the tendency of right-wing populist movements and parties to present themselves as defenders of the Judeo-Christian heritage. He said that it should not be forgotten that there has always been persecution of Judaism on the basis of these ideas. Now it is primarily Muslims who are being turned into objects of exclusion. The religious communities in Europe had learned to meet each other face to face after a long history "written in blood and tears," Hofmeister said. Now, he said, a new phase of dialogue is necessary: it is necessary to stand "side by side" against a politics and economy that acts without a religious value basis, stirs up nationalistic egoism and loses people's trust in the process.

Imam Pallavicini, who works in Brussels as a representative of Muslims in 22 countries, drew a parallel between the alleged "holy war" of the IS terrorists and that justified by Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine. Both represent a demonization of tolerance and pluralism, which contradicts the actual value foundation of the religions. The Muslim cleric cited the vision of EU founding figures Schuman,

De Gasperi and Adenauer, to serve as an example to us all as we look to cooperation and cohesion. Pallavicini turned against phenomena hostile to dialogue such as ghettoization, the - often hidden - assumption of one's own superiority, relativism and an aggressive secularism. He had contradicted Patriarch Cyril in a letter to the Patriarchate in Moscow, according to which there are no values "in the West" and the Russian East must uphold them.

Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Arsenios (Kardamakis) of Vienna, Metropolitan Emmanuel (Adamakis) of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and Jorgen Skov Sorensen, general secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), also spoke.

Jan Olbrycht and György Hölvényi, Co-chairmen of the EPP working group for intercultural and religious dialogue, highlighted the role of religions during conflicts and specified that when discussing the role of churches in the context of Russian aggression in Ukraine, it is necessary to look at the way and content of their communication in solving social problems. According to them, the message of the conference is to focus together on peace-building, security and the role of inter-religious dialogue during war.

"While we are debating the role of the churches in the context of the unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine, we must also examine how and what content the churches deal with in their communication about social issues." Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP added: the church and religions have an important influence on social and political processes.

It is widely known that religion is a leading cause of conflict in the world, which is a natural consequence of the fact that religiosity is an important element of human identity.

Christiaan Alting von Geusau, president of the international Catholic public life network ICLN, emphasized in his speech: totalitarian systems and ideologies are not by chance so afraid of religion and religious people [...] since for believers, loyalty to God is the most important thing. "Loyalty to the state or the party and the ideology only follows after that," explained the politician, referring to how big a role he played in the fall of communism in Central Europe in 1989, "the faith of the brave Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Polish people commitment to it".

FVP Karas pointed out that if the religious dimension was ignored in the creation of politics, society would fail, because a large part of it would feel excluded, which could lead to its radicalization. This is happening in France, where the large Muslim community is being ignored. He also spoke out against the "instrumentalization" of religion, which occurred in Russia during the aggression against Ukraine, when the Orthodox Church "sanctified" this war.

He recalled that the EU institutions have a tradition of bringing together the three main religions and various branches of Christianity around the round table to conduct a dialogue. "However, I was attracted by the opinion that there is no need to talk about the Judeo-Christian roots of Europe in order to distinguish ourselves from Muslims. Because Christians in Europe persecuted Jews for centuries. That was instructive for me, and I will no longer use this phrase. It is better to say, that we have common values," concluded FVP Karas*.

* part of the text was taken from the article published in Kathpress: <https://www.vindobona.org/article/annual-meeting-for-intercultural-and-religious-dialogue-of-the-european-peoples-party-in-vienna>



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