



# A LOOK BACK AT 2019-2021

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## INTRODUCTION

The EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue activities aim to promote mutual understanding and an active sense of European citizenship for a peaceful living together. Decision makers are called to provide answers to the complex crisis with political, economic, religious and cultural implications in Europe.

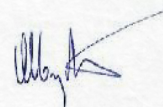
‘Intercultural and Religious Dialogue’ does not mean theological discussions in the European Parliament. It is about listening to people from the sphere of religion and exchanging views with representatives of academia, governments, European Institutions on issues of common interest or concern and in connection to religion and intercultural relations.

The Working Group on ‘Intercultural and Religious Dialogue’ is an official structure of the EPP Group and is co-chaired by Jan Olbrycht MEP and György Hölvényi MEP, in which a number of EPP Group Members of the European Parliament gather regularly to deal with religious and intercultural issues.

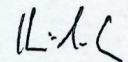
Our events provide for interaction at the highest possible level between religious authorities and politicians. We aim to spread information about EPP Group policy initiatives; represent the religious and cultural aspects regarding a number of policy areas; contribute to an attractive vision of modern Christian Democracy in Europe; reinforce non-negotiable European fundamental values and promote a model of society that strengthens cohesion and peaceful coexistence of cultures.

This publication contains a selection of speeches delivered during our events in the period of September 2019 until December 2021.

Enjoy your reading!



Jan Olbrycht MEP



György Hölvényi MEP

Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue



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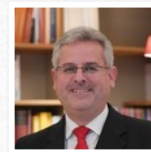
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## WORKING GROUP MEETING ON 'LEGISLATIVE WORK OPPORTUNITIES: \*DREAMS & REALITIES\* 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

**INTERVENTION BY MR JOSÉ LUIS BAZÁN, LEGAL ADVISOR, COMMISSION OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (COMECE)**

### CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

#### 1.- Language as a central political task



Language is of utmost importance in politics, shaping realities, framing debates, defining priorities and giving orientation to societies. The European Parliament plays an immense role in this regard, and its resolutions and recommendations (not to mention the binding legislative pieces) have an immense impact in international fora, mass media and national politics. Innovative linguistic approach is needed to reorient political mainstream to be more respectful of transcendent human dignity, and the fundamental rights derive from the condition of the person not as an isolated individual but as an individual-in-relation, naturally born and brought up in a family and in a particular society and tradition, with rights, duties and responsibilities.

Political “linguistic task” could take the direction of using **mainstream language and formula**, e.g., to reconduct the notion of surrogacy (“surrogate motherhood”) to “reproductive exploitation” and put it under the umbrella of human trafficking and violence against women, as it was already done by the European Parliament<sup>1</sup>. On the basis of that concept and resolution, an important line of work should be developed, extracting all consequences that should be attributed to any form of human trafficking. Another example could be the use of the notion of “vulnerability”, widespread and undefined expression which is overused for ideological purposes, in cases where there is a real lack of protection for a group or “minority”, such as asylum seekers looking for international protection on the ground of religious persecution: e.g., mainstream media have reports about cases where national authorities test the veracity of a Christian refugee application asking him the list of prophets of the Ancient Testament. By the way, the same happens to non-believers or atheist asylum seekers, when they are asked about Ancient Greek materialist philosophers. **Religious illiteracy** seems to be a problem in some asylum administration in certain EU Member States. Christian asylum seekers, in particular Muslims converted into Christianity, face harassment in detention centers in Europe, as it has widely reported by mainstream media in countries such as Sweden or Germany. The EU is responsible for EU Member States to fully and properly implement the **Receptions' Directive**, which obliges them to protect asylum seekers in refugee centres against any kind of harassment, intolerance and coercion<sup>2</sup>. Misleading interpretation services provided to Christian asylum seekers have been also reported, damaging their prospects to obtain international protection.

Another way of bringing forward a more truthful political language that respects the reality of the trans-

1 - European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2015 on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter

- European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2016 on implementation of the Directive 2011/36/EU of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims from a gender perspective

2 Article 18.4 Directive 2013/33/EU of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection: “Member States shall take appropriate measures to prevent assault and gender-based violence, including sexual assault and harassment, within the premises and accommodation centres referred to in paragraph 1(a) and (b).”



cent dignity of the person would be **“to coin” new expressions and terms**, that better corresponds to the reality that is expressed. For example, the expression “forced conversion” applied to mostly women coerced to falsely convert, usually into Islam, in countries such as Pakistan, is extremely inaccurate. This painful phenomenon entails a number of chained criminal acts that the expression “forced conversion” hardly reveals: abduction, systematic rape, intimidation and coercion (and even, physical mistreatment) and, finally, false conversion (only in external forum). A new expression is needed to fully contain these serious criminal actions, which are codified in legislation worldwide, and avoid misleading debates about what is considered “only” as a religious freedom issue, where it is basically, a much broader human rights’ issue, involving *absolute rights*<sup>3</sup> such as the right not to be subject to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or to servitude<sup>4</sup>, and the prohibition of abduction<sup>5</sup>.

The European Parliament has built up a kind of “doctrine” in important areas, including human rights issues, and more **follow up should be done**. Important lines of work, for example, regarding religious freedom, can be put forward, just “chaining” previous resolutions and recommendations. We could mention, in this respect, as an example, its resolution that recognises Churches and religious communities as *“frontline and long-standing operational field actors in the provision of development and humanitarian assistance”*, requesting a formal **partnership system** to the EU, *“based on the experiences of international organisations and programmes (such as UNICEF, the World Bank, WHO or the UN Development Programme), and good practices in EU Member States and abroad”*, that should include **non-discriminatory access to EU funding** in equal foot with other non-State actors. Another case-example is the landmark **“ISIS Genocide Resolution”**<sup>7</sup>, that should be complemented with more political work looking for the real and practical accountability of criminals and the concrete compensation for most vulnerable groups of victims (including Christians & Yazidis). Moreover, visibility of the newly adopted **UN International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief** (22 August) should be given by the European Parliament.

It is also important that the texts, either political or legislative, **mention explicitly “Churches and religious communities”** to ensure due visibility to their laudable work and giving a sense of normality to their consideration as human rights, humanitarian and development actors. As many of the EU instruments and pieces of legislation are in an on-going process of change, careful consideration should be made to those instruments that already contained that explicit reference, in order to, at least, maintain it.

In the upcoming years, the European Parliament will have to face several challenges, as other EU and Member States institutions, that will define the orientation of the EU for decades. Some of them have already been on the table for years (e.g., migration challenges or religious freedom inside and outside Europe), and many others will probably be added or intensified (e.g., demographic unsustainability of many European societies under the current parameters, or impact of artificial intelligence in daily life, including work and family life).

3 An absolute right is a right that cannot be limited or infringed under any circumstances, not even during a declared state of emergency: European Commission, EMN glossary, “Fundamental rights”, note 2.

4 Articles 7 and 8.2 ICCPR

5 Paragraph 13.b) of the CCPR General Comment No. 29: Article 4: Derogations during a State of Emergency, adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee, on 31 August 2001.

6 European Parliament resolution of 3 October 2017 on addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries, G and paragraph 41.

7 European Parliament resolution of 4 February 2016 on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called ‘ISIS/Daesh’

## 2.- Some religious freedom challenges

Since 2013, the EEAS has argued about the **EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB)** as their principal religious freedom instrument, but little is known about its **implementation and reporting activities**. Even if certain information concerning victims of religious freedom violation could be sensitive, a EEAS-EP mechanism could be design for MEPs to be informed about what’s going on in third countries and for the EEAS also to receive their inputs (e.g., through the ForB Intergroup or other EP party or cross-party configurations). The position of the **EU Special Envoy for FoRB should be enhanced** allocating more personal and financial resources, and placing that position in the EC organigram as direct advisor to the President of the EC.

A wide (unjustified) bias is present in many EU corners with regard to **humanitarian and development activities** carried out by Churches and religious actors: a certain “prevention” and even rejection exists towards them as they are negatively perceived as “proselitizing” institutions, nearly incapable of any kind of impartiality and neutrality in providing humanitarian or development aid. The description of the seminar *“What’s religion got to do with it?”* included in the official programme of the 2019 European Development Days (under the title *Addressing inequalities*) shows this negative or “suspect” approach to, in particular, Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

The truth is that the reality contradicts this misleading and irrational fear. For example, WHO recognised that in Sub-Saharan Africa, access of its population to health would be impossible without the Catholic Church, as nearly 40% of health services are provided by religious orders and faith-based organisations. This is particularly true when it comes to rural and remote areas, where governments haven’t set up public facilities, and the only ones that are permanently present taking care of the poorest are religious orders.

International organisations but also national aid and humanitarian bodies **widely recognise the indispensable role of Churches and religious actors** (as well as NGOs and CSOs) in overcoming humanitarian and development needs of suffering people and to reinforce their resilience. They are, sometimes, implementing partners of the EU or other international and national organisations, but frequently they rely on their own private donors that give them the funds to keep on doing their work.

Another spread bias is the consideration that Churches and religious organisations are not in the “list” of **human rights organisations**, as they have their own “agenda”, which is pastoral, liturgical and “religious” (or even, self-interest centered) but unrelated to the “real” defence of the human being fundamental rights as such, maybe with the exception of religious freedom. Again, the reality on the ground strongly contradicts this spread bias and shows how Churches act frequently as efficient human rights defenders. We can mention, e.g., how the Catholic Church in Eritrea objecting governmental dictatorship and its lack of preoccupation towards its own citizens, is suffering the authorities’ retaliation, and as a consequence 29 Catholic medical facilities and hospitals plus 4 schools have need nationalised without compensation, being religious workers dismissed without justification. Another case: the role of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, protecting students against dictatorial repression of the government and providing refugee to them when

8 “Given the way that the Christian world has tried to impose its religious beliefs on the rest of the world in the past, it is not surprising that new overtures are met with scepticism.

-When development actors work with faith-leaders, they must guard against instrumentalising them.

-Development organisations, including those that are faith-based, should respect local communities’ religious practices.”



persecuted by paramilitary groups, being a bishop physically attacked because of his vocal position in favour of democracy and civic freedoms. [Catholic Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah](#) of Sokoto Diocese (Nigeria) is a national leader fighting against the use of hate speech against the Fulani people (mostly Muslim) and calling on all Nigerians to be their brothers' keepers and avoid ethno-religious profiling in dealing with each other. These are only three examples, but hundreds if not thousand could be mention about the historical and actual role of Churches and religious leaders requesting democracy, freedom and respect to human rights in all continents.

The expression **freedom from religion** to define the right not to have a religion is an emerging trend. Certainly, from the right to religious freedom is derived the right to have or not to have a religion. However, the human rights language should preserve its descriptive and neutral nature and refuse pejorative or biased terminology. The expression freedom from religion assumes the implicit pejorative assessment that to be free one must be liberated from religion, labeling religion as something oppressive. The same could be said about the formula freedom from atheism to define the right to have a religion, as partial and biased.

As religion is perceived in some EU desks as a "difficult and challenging" but necessary reality to deal with, there is a clear attempt **to instrumentalize religious freedom putting aside its main content** (e.g., right to convert, public expression of faith, etc.) and focusing in a mainstream (and more comfortable) goal, which is **advancing the gender ideology through the so-called "gender empowerment"**. The aim would be to reshape from inside the understanding of the role and position of male and female faithful in certain Churches, whose integral anthropology and theology does not fit with the mainstream liberal gender ideology. This has been made clear in the September 2019 important event presenting the EEAS project on "Global Exchange on Society and Religion", where the initial video presentation contained 2 male and 2 female testimonies, being the female an Anglican pastor (fully dressed as cleric) and a responsible for women empowerment in a humanitarian organisation. At the same time, the line of the Danish Ambassador for Freedom of Religion clearly showed the governmental position to advance women's agenda under the umbrella of religious freedom. The 2018 European Development Days, a big gathering organised by DG DEVCO (European Commission), dedicated to the topic *Women and Girls at the Forefront of Sustainable Development: protect, empower, invest*, held a seminar on What's religion got to do with it?, whose proceedings contain a clear gender-oriented language and ideas, derived from the chosen critical profile of the invited speakers stating, for example, that:

*"Religious practices and structures are often highly patriarchal, dominated by male leadership, and coined in a language that legitimizes discrimination, exclusion, and even violence against women, LGBTQI people and other marginalized groups and individuals".<sup>9</sup>*

9 P. 177. Other statements contained in the proceedings say as follows: "Advocates argued that cooperation with religious leaders, organisations and communities can encourage gender-sensitive interpretations of religious scripture and empower marginalized voices. Critics point to the danger of legitimizing patriarchal structures and practices through enhanced cooperation with religious actors. Religious language is powerful and religious leadership is often male-dominated, and even the inclusion of female voices is no guarantee against patriarchal interpretations" (p. 176). "Religion also has a role to play in producing a positive image of the LGBTI community" (p. 15)

Another issue that has occupied the European Parliament in the past is that of abusive **child removal by social services** and workers depriving parents of their children's custody and violating fundamental parental rights, in particular in Nordic countries.<sup>10</sup> However a particular and dangerous trend seems to emerge, involving the right to religious freedom of parents and their children. The Nordic Committee for Human Rights has denounced that:

*"Parents with religious and philosophical beliefs, which do not seem to be politically accepted, are often deemed as unsuitable parents, which invariably leads the social councils, acting upon the advice of the social workers, to remove the children from their families and place them in foster homes."<sup>11</sup>*

**Contradiction between mainstream cultural settings or moral prevalent assessment in societies with family or individual understanding about a social or ethical issue** should not endanger the fundamental rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. To separate children from their parents just because of the beliefs of the latest to be considered as "non-mainstream" should be considered a criminal act.

Conscientious rights are at stake in many other cases, and there should be a **recognition of the fundamental right to conscientious objection** in medical, paramedical and pharmaceutical services, a right which is put into question by, e.g., a controversial FEMM report.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the European Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises in its Article 10.2 a general right to conscientious objection, subject to the national laws governing the exercise of this right, is a strong argument, as any regulation of a fundamental right can't erode its natural or essential content or deprive it of efficacy.

**Hate speech** has become a central question in EU internal and external policies. While as a matter of principle, freedom of speech can be limited or restricted under certain conditions and circumstances, as recognised by the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, certain abusive interpretations label as hate speech the free expression of thoughts or feelings that contradict mainstream opinions: e.g., to hold that marriage should be monogamous without any exception, that only one male and one female can form a marriage or that adopted children are entitled to a father and a mother. Academic freedom is also endangered by certain abusive interpretations of hate speech, and curiously, the European Parliament make a strong defence of academic freedom outside the EU.<sup>13</sup>

It has recently announced that for the first time, the US will apply a **travel ban for notorious religious freedom violators**.<sup>14</sup> Sanctions are also an important tool in hands of the EU to promote its values outside: this

10 For example, EP Committee of Petitions, Report and Recommendations on the Activities of the Working Group on Child Welfare Issues, 20 June 2017, "Social services in the Nordic Countries", page 11 et seq. See also a recent case: Katle O'Neill, "Mother to sue over 'wrongful removal' of children by Dutch social services", The Telegraph 12 October 2019. See also, Report of the PACE Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development Rapporteur: Mr Valeriu GHILETCHI, Striking a balance between the best interest of the child and the need to keep families together, 6 June 2018.

11 The Nordic Committee for Human Rights, Report: Child Removal Cases in Sweden and the neighbouring Nordic countries, 2012.

12 Study requested by FEMM Committee, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union PE 604.969 - Sexual and reproductive health rights and the implication of conscientious objection, October 2018.

13 European Parliament recommendation of 29 November 2018 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action

14 First time applied on 13 September by the US against 2 Russian officials.



practical measure could be explored as a way of responding against systematic or severe religious freedom violations, when identifying the main responsible persons in their design or implementation.

The EU has a specific human right body, **the EU Fundamental Rights Agency that works in the area of religious freedom** focusing on **Anti-Muslim hatred and Anti-Semitism, but Anti-Christian hatred and attacks remain invisible**. However, the reality of attacks against Christians in the EU is largely unreported, including mainstream media. In accordance with [the French Ministry of Interior 2017 figures](#), the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches are top in attacks against worship places and cemeteries: 878 out of 978 recorded (2 attacks per day). The same Minister reported that the number of [Anti-Christian acts in France in 2018 was 1063](#) (the same year there were 100 anti-Muslim acts, and 541 anti-Semitic acts). Germany's federal police recorded almost [100 attacks on Christians or Christian institutions in Germany in 2017](#). Most violent incidents occurred among asylum-seekers living together in refugee homes. In Spain, out of 268 hate crimes recorded, [52 were committed against Christians](#) (7 Anti-semitic and 45 anti-Muslim cases). The [Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe](#) regularly reports on anti-Christian attacks in different European countries. The OSCE also appointed a [Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination](#), also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions. The European Commission encouraged Member States to collect as many data as possible relating to offences of members of religious communities.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.- Migration and asylum

Migration and asylum policies present a huge number of challenges. Of them, two are not frequently mentioned in the public debate. First, the right to stay in one's homeland as a primary fundamental right and its connection with SDGs (end poverty, hunger; peace and reconciliation, etc...). The right to migrate appears as a first right, when actually in a forced migratory context, is a subsidiary right, as the conditions in one's homeland don't permit a safe and dignified life for a person and his family. The right to remain in one's homeland is a basic right, and the efforts of the international community should address it, not only from a social and economic development perspective, but also promoting the reinforcement of State democratic institutions, including rule of law and respect of human dignity.

Another "missed right" in the context of the migration debate is that of the right to return. Return appears in policies and debates as a forced action by States towards irregular migrants, sending them back to their country. While this perspective is valid, is not complete. The [2019 UNHCR return intention survey](#) shows that about **75.2% of Syrian refugees hope to return one day to Syria**, if the situation improves.<sup>16</sup> To make real and effective the right of refugees to return to their home country in dignity and safety is also a geopolitical issue in the Middle East, as it tend to maintain a healthy (and historical) religious and cultural diversity in those societies and to reduce its radicalization: this is particularly applicable to Middle East Christian refugees, that have been historically and currently as bridges between factions in Islam. Assistance is needed in the countries of origin (reconstruction of houses, buildings, economic and social fabric, property and housing rights' protection, etc.) for people to be able to return and make their own country more prosperous.

<sup>15</sup> Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission, 18 February 2014 to a parliamentary question.

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, Fifth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, March 2019.

### 4.- Family related issues

While family policies are **not, mostly, a competence of the EU**, in areas linked to family issues in which there is shared competence between the EU and Member States, the **principle of subsidiarity**<sup>17</sup> should be applied. Nevertheless, **family mainstreaming** and the promotion of **good practices in EU Member States** can be part of the EU actions in this domain. More concretely, **tax justice is a key issue for European families, in particular for large families**. 0% or reduced VAT for babies and pregnant women/mothers of babies should be included in EU taxation legislation.

**Women's empowerment** is one of the key political messages and actions promoted by the EU. But the understanding of empowerment for women is restricted to certain areas and is far from include motherhood. **A biased understanding of empowerment tends to focus on labour, political or business empowerment of women, lowering down the status of woman as a mother, which does not receive priority treatment, despite the demographic challenge in the EU.**<sup>18</sup> **Practical measures should be implemented** to consider the personal, familiar, economic and social efforts made by a family which brings a child to our world, and the immense benefits to the society as a whole: e.g., motherhood as a period to be counted totally or partially for calculation of pensions.

Motherhood is seen in some European societies as a kind of way of submission for women, from which they should be helped to "emancipate". Negative messages are conveyed, considering maternity as a "contraception failure", consequence of "lack of knowledge, culture or education". **This negative portray of pregnant women and young mothers favours maternal harassment**, particularly in developed countries, including the EU<sup>19</sup>, and not only at work, but also in public places. These messages and actions should be contemplated as a type of "gender-based violence".<sup>20</sup> Concerning the **health impact of provoked abortions in women, still remains an** (intentionally) invisible and, even, hidden reality. The **protection of unborn handicapped children** should be addressed as an obligation by the EU as Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that enshrines the principle of best interest of the child, as well as the right not to be subject to torture or cruel and inhuman treatment (Art. 15). Moreover, it is important to combat "*stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life*" (Article 8.2 b) UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, e.g., Down syndrome persons.

**Sexualization of childhood** is a worrying trend in society, mass and social media, even in school through premature school curricula and activities, as well as early access to pornography.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Applicable when the objectives of an action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, but can be better achieved at Union level, 'by reason of the scale and effects of the proposed action'. See Factsheet on the principle of subsidiarity.

<sup>18</sup> Demography is not only about active aging and migration: it is about family and natality. The EU Demography Forum existed until 2013 (4th edition) and should be reactivated.

<sup>19</sup> "Almost half of all pregnant women and new mothers in the United Kingdom experience discrimination at work": Eurofound, Pregnancy discrimination in the workplace, 2006. European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2018 on measures to prevent and combat mobbing and sexual harassment at workplace, in public spaces, and political life in the EU (paragraphs 7, 23, 36-39). See also: Equality and Human Rights Commission on harassment during pregnancy.

<sup>20</sup> Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, paragraph 17.

<sup>21</sup> Only for girls: European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2013 on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU See also: EPP Group Hearing on sexualisation of girls (12-06-06).



## 5.- Further considerations

The EU is a voice of reference in international fora (e.g., the UN) in human rights issues. It is important to ensure that its voice conveys the right messages about the issues mentioned above, and many others. The European Parliament adopts positions related to the intervention of the EU in these international for a.

There is a risk of “ideological neo-colonization” by the EU, that has been already denounced by some States and civil society actors in other continents. It is important to ensure that development and international cooperation aid provided by the EU is not conditioned to ensure certain ideological practices (e.g., adoption of a same sex “marriage” legislation). The same applies to candidate states to EU membership, where full **transparency in decisions and negotiations** should be given by those representing the EU, ensuring that EU legal standards don't include ideological views which are not actually legal requirements for EU membership.

For years, the **proposed “EU Antidiscrimination Directive”** has been pushed by some States, parties and NGOs, in order to be adopted by the EU. However, its adoption will bring a serious potential impact in restricting of fundamental rights, including free speech, freedom of conscience and religious freedom.

The EC Communication 16 April 2019 “More efficient decision-making in social policy: Identification of areas for an enhanced move to qualified majority voting” opts for moving to **qualified majority voting**, a measure that has to be supported by all national parliaments and by the European Parliament. In certain **sensitive ethical issues**, a qualified majority would endanger the public order in many countries that have a limited weight in the qualification of the majority.

## SEMINAR ON “THE ROLE OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE PROCESS OF PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION”. THE CASE OF GEORGIA 19 NOVEMBER 2019

### INTERVENTION BY MS MAIREAD MCGUINNESS MEP, FORMER FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PARLIAMENT'S DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES, RELIGIONS AND NON-CONFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS (ARTICLE 17 TFEU)



Excellencies and distinguished visitors here to the Parliament. My role here this morning is perhaps the easier part, my name is **Mairead McGUINNESS**. I am first vice president and I have responsibility for dialogue with religious and non-concessional organizations.

And this is a regular dialogue we engage with our partners on many issues of policy in Europe. So my function here in that capacity is to welcome you to the Parliament.

We are talking about the role of churches and religious communities in peace building and conflict prevention. I mean this is a huge task and perhaps because I come from Ireland where, as you know, 30 years ago we managed to vote for peace. We had a long and troubled history of conflict in Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom, with divisions between our peoples and some of it based on faith others for other reasons, but I recall very well, that over the long period of that conflict the role of the churches was particularly important and they worked very well in the background trying to build an understanding within their own communities firstly, but then across communities, across religious divides and I think you know from your own experience that it is far easier to wage war than to build peace. In my experience I grew up near to the border with Northern Ireland and the conflict and I recall all of the details, the horror of that, and it took very brave men and women to perhaps go beyond their comfort zone to try and build peace. And therefore, I think those of us who are here this morning to support your work understand that you too may occasionally have to go beyond your comfort zone in order to build a future, that is based on peace. And the President of the European Commission recently told the Parliament I think quite a shocking statistic that globally there are 60 wars raging. So there is, if you like, more wars than peace in our world today and I suppose therefore, those who speak of peace and have peace in their hearts and in their values have a particular responsibility when it comes to building peace. I suppose, a better part would be to prevent conflict at all, but indeed we try that but very often it doesn't work. And therefore, we are obliged to build peace, and sometimes the peace we build is fragile and it needs nurturing and care and protection.

I am impressed that the religious leaders and religious communities have good connections between and with each other. And I think you have got a great basis for your work. And sometimes we require even in our work here and I know my colleagues in the Parliament, we sometimes have to rise above the issues and to take a consultant review. The European Parliament and the European way of life is on a compromise and consensus and that can be difficult because we all hold dearly our opinions and sometimes want to defend them strongly. But in order for us as an Union to make progress, we are required to find compromise with the person opposite who may take a very different view and I suppose one of the worries I have in politics today is that there are fewer and fewer people willing to make that step, that compromise, towards a place where we can all find comfort and we can all work together.



So with those few words, I'm also conscious of the connections between Georgia and the European Union and I think our values are common. The dignity of the person and this idea, that we need to build together a piece that currently evades us. I think the dialogue between and within Georgian society and Europe is very much key to promoting peace and building resilience within our societies as I minded that his All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew recalled last week in a speech to the College of Europe in Bruges, and I quote: "dialogue is the most effective means for addressing problems and it promotes confidence and mutual acceptance. It is a such a gesture of solidarity and a source of solidarity", but then we all know that the dialogue is difficult. I think we all know that we need to open our ears, perhaps if we recall our shared values and then overcome that which makes dialogue difficult and sometimes perhaps I should not preach to Your Excellencies, but forgiveness is the greatest challenge of all and sometimes in building peace we need to find forgiveness in our hearts. And again, reflecting on my own background, I have been hugely impressed by the families and friends of those murdered or badly injured in our conflict to Northern Ireland and who have been brave enough to say: "we forgive and we want to move on". So maybe we should learn from those who have been the victims of violence in the past because they can show us the way.

I started by saying that mine is the easier part, but I hope my few words will add to your conversations, your important debate today, which is vital for so many people in Georgia and indeed here in the European Union. And I regret to say that part of my work requires me to be elsewhere at various moments. So while I won't be in the room with you, I will be kept in touch with the work that you do here and from the bottom of my heart and from the work that I do in Parliament. I wish you well. I know it is a challenge but I believe we are all gathered here today because we want things to be better. And therefore, I think things will be better; perhaps we also need the art of patience and perseverance and that other word "resilience". So my best wishes for you on this important occasion. I am pleased that so many colleagues here from the Parliament are with us and I wish you well. So good morning and welcome.

#### INTERVENTION BY MS RASA JUKNEVIČIENĖ MEP, VICE-CHAIR OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS (ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA) DELEGATION



Now it is my turn, thank you so much, thank you for your important introductory words. My name is **Rasa JUKNEVIČIENĖ**, I am from Lithuania. But now I am for the first time as an elected as member of the European Parliament. So not only Lithuania is my responsibility as we have to realize being members of the European Parliament we have to do as much as possible for the European Parliament. We have to do as much as possible for the European Union and interests of the dialogue, peace everywhere. Thank you again.

I will not go into a long intervention because I met many of you yesterday and we had a very, I would say, fruitful meeting and exchange of views. Myself, as well, I am the Chair of the Delegation to South Caucasus. It means Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, so it is not only because of that but because of very deep interests in my country. For myself as politician, Georgia and South Caucasus, Ukraine, Moldova, other countries, we call them Eastern partnership countries, always were very important for my region as well. I think that you have experience which we do not have and we have experience which I would say, maybe will be and is important for you as well. What I noticed from yesterday in the meeting is that we have to speak

we have to have dialogue, to understand better the European Union from your side and from our side. Especially those people who are maybe not so close as we are to your region have to understand better. But only one sentence from our own experience, I mean Lithuanian experience. Since we became members of the European Union and NATO we thought, in the very beginning, that the European Union will come and do everything instead of us. That the European Union will do everything including education, including all, all things we needed to do but we realize that first of all that the European Union is giving instruments and can give us only the nature and common understanding values, which we need to implement into our life. But another thing is our own work at home. So what we are trying to do is to implement the requirements when we started all necessary negotiations. But of course, there are very many areas where countries in the European Union are responsible themselves, for example education or family issues or other things which are not regulated. Basically, in very concrete terms from the European Union size. So it is up to each country to realize their own interests and what they think is better to them. But of course, what is the European Union? It is in favour of human rights, of the rights of minorities, of gender equality, etcetera. So what the European Union would never accept is hate speech, criminalization of some minorities and this is what I think important for your communities as well. Every human being is important for every religious community. So that is why it is so important to meet you today. And first of all, I would like to invite bishop Jakob Jakobishvili, Bishop of Bodbe to take the floor.

#### INTERVENTION BY JAKOB JAKOBISHVILI, BISHOP OF BODBE, PATRIARCHAL VICAR OF THE CATHOLICOS - PATRIARCH OF ALL GEORGIA



Hello, good morning. I want to express my appreciation, I want to thank the organizers, the European Parliament and its representatives for showing good will and allowing us to share our standpoints and opinions about what should be developments in relation with occupation and other issues and what are our approaches.

First of all, let me share the blessing of our patriarch H. H. Patriarch of Georgian Orthodox Church. We, the representatives of different confessions, welcome the fact that we are invited together from Georgia and now we talk face-to-face and without any mediation and intermediaries and this is the healthiest form of communication. We are the people who always keep in mind what is told to us, as we can harvest good fruit from it and we can develop it further. Firstly, the situation is very hard in Georgia, I mean the occupation: 22% of Georgian territories is not only occupied but annexed nowadays. I want you to know the opinion of our people, our church and also the communities of different confessions, that we unanimously would never agree or recognize the occupation. But our methods and our ways of struggling with these of course are and will be peaceful and civilized and we hope very much that Europe and our strategic partners will help us in many occasions. Of course, we realize that this process will take long. I want to tell you what is the real situation now in Abkhazia. I was participating in Abkhazia in the war. I lost many friends there but I always sympathized with Abkhazian people because it was not war between Georgians and Abkhazians. It was the war between Russia and Georgia. Russians instigated the war unfortunately and the occupation of the territories of Georgia was the result of the war. When the Russian Empire, Soviet Empire disintegrated, Russia was afraid that they would lose control and they immediately started to provoke such wars and taking territories and the result was in 2008 when they formalized this seizure. We never supported the war or resolving these issues by war. We want to solve



the problems with peace, but frankly speaking Russia worked and planted the disgust towards Georgians in new generations. And today Russians experience the same in Abkhazia. And Russia doesn't need these occupied territories of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. By doing this they want to weaken Georgia or have a leverage to control it and to change the orientation of Georgian people towards Russia. Russia wants to gain over Georgians but let me assure you that most of the Georgians are pro-western and pro-European and consider themselves as Europeans, as we will never have the desire to be on the side of the conqueror.

In addition, I want you to know that there are many griefs of Georgians in Sokhumi and they were levelled by tractors and bulldozers. So they abolished our graves, and we do not have them anymore, they destroyed even memories. We cannot travel there to visit the graves of our parents or grandparents. Also, it's impossible to visit the churches, which are in occupied territories. I think it will be a good idea, if you could help us, when we go there if they see us, Georgian clergy, coming to worship the holy places in Abkhazia and that we are peaceful and we do not want to harm them. Abkhazians are our brothers, even historically they are our brothers and we have absolutely nothing against them. We want nothing but all good for them, but we are in favour of restoring the historical justice.

Another issue is David Gareji monastic complex. This is also directly provoked by Russia. Allegedly it is an issue between Georgia and Azerbaijan, but indeed it is provoked by Russia. Now, we are looking at our government. If the government reconciles this issue in its negotiations with Azerbaijan, we will see, we also have our own good connections with their authorities, not only with the clergy but also with Azerbaijan people. If the government fills in its effort, of course, it will be good, but if not we will take care of it. It is our national territory, but it is also under the governance of the church. So if not the government, we will take care to recover this status and I think it's visible because I cannot share all information now, but we have our own ways how to achieve this and your support is very important in this undertaking. Our relationship with Russia is actually frozen because they don't even think to talk to us. If they want to talk, they start just with telling us to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states and this approach is incorrect. Of course, it's against the Georgian National interests. Historically these lands were Georgian and a pre-condition for talks is that first you recognize this territories and then we can talk but this is a wrong approach. Of course, we could use public diplomacy, but we're a small nation. So we cannot afford travelling to the other side and I don't even want to travel there. So Russia is arrogant and they don't treat us as equal partner and your engagement and our other great partners' engagement, the USA's engagement will facilitate the process. I want to thank you that you always recognize out territorial integrity. This is very good and also I ask you that in every document, paper or address, please mention Georgia, I see that Ukraine is often mentioned in your announcements or statements. But please mention Georgia as well. Europe and US made a mistake in 2008 because they treated Russia softly and we see what happened a few years after: Crimea was taken the same way and other territories, Ukrainian territories as well by Russia. We want to peacefully resolve the issues. But of course everything is happening by the will of God almighty and we are ready to face everything what God decides.

Now, the borderization, this process of creeping borders. So unfortunately Russians control the maps and since they recognized the so-called South Ossetian country they change the outline of the border. Once we look to Europe and to the free world, they creep slowly village by village. Of course, we will take back our territories from Russians eventually but we need to plan roadmaps together with you. We will wait patiently but we will take ours back.

Let me also discuss our relationship with other regions, neighbours, Muslim countries. Turkey is our strategic partner likewise. Azerbaijan, I am now talking about our direct neighbours. We can see what are the positions and exchanges between Turkey and we see your and the USA's positions as well, but we are cautious, we have a cautious position because they are our trade partner and we are taking into consideration your views, but you should also do the same. So you should take into consideration our opinions, note that we are pro-European, that we are part of Europe and our mentality historically is European because our civilization is based on Christianity from the first centuries A.D.

In Northern Caucasus, generally, we have good positions; the only exception is Chechnya, which is the stronghold of the Russian president. Its president is not hostile towards Georgia, but when it comes to people-to-people relationship these things over Chechens, even me, I have good relationship with ordinary people in Chechnya; they trust us, they trust me, nothing to say about Christians and inter-confessional relations. In Georgia it is not the first time that we travel in this composition, we have been together to the US. I do not know what information is shared to you, but we are friends and our parishes and communities also, we try not to prevent issues of controversies. We have a very healthy relationship; our counterparts are here so you can ask them.

Europe should learn tolerance from us. I think we can even teach tolerance to Europe. We can set an example because for many centuries in the centre of the Old Town Tbilisi even nowadays we have all Global religions' temples. Not only Orthodox Church but also Muslim mosques, the oldest synagogue and I want to emphasize that we have the Jewish representative here. He is attending this conference and can assure, that Georgia is the only country in the world where we never had any hostility against Jews. We always lived peacefully as brothers. So when you point out to be tolerant, please keep in mind that it is genetically encoded in Georgians. However, religious traditions prompt us not to tolerate the bad things, we cannot be tolerant towards sin. We look at humans as the image of God, but of course, we cannot approve wrongdoings. Of course, I won't teach anyone how to live. If they ask me, maybe I will tell them. Thank you very much. And please don't mention only Ukraine, also support Georgia and Moldova as well, as they also face very hard problems and I believe after a while we will worthily prepare and you will have another new worthy member in the European Union, I mean, Georgia. The European Union is not a military Alliance, it is a union of free nations, united by free will, like a family with many children that is good and is upbringing good children. If you have Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova as new members, it will be good for both sides, for us and for the EU.

Let me also mention NATO. Most of Georgians want to be a part of NATO. It depends now on NATO. I think they also will form their opinion. So thank you very much and God bless you.



### INTERVENTION BY PROFESSOR TEA GOGOTISHVILI, OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PATRIARCHATE TO THE INTERRELIGIOUS COUNCIL



Good morning, Thank you very much for organizing this meeting and for the opportunity to be with you.

The inter-religious Council of Georgia was created in 2011. Its creator and coordinator of its activities was Mr. Paata Gachechiladze, the NGO 21st Century. He is the member of our delegation today. Inter-religious Council represents a platform for dialogue between religious communities existing in the country, where representatives of these communities discuss existing issues and work on methods to overcome these challenges.

In Inter-religious Council there are 9 Religious confessions in Georgia: Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church of Georgia, the Jewish community in Georgia, the Holy Apostolic Armenian Church, the Muslim authority of the entire Georgia, the Apostolic Catholic administration of South Caucasus, Yezidi community, Evangelic Lutheran church, Evangelic Baptist Church and Pentecost Church. Goals of the interreligious council are: first, consideration of the questions of interest to the religious communities and common planning and execution of the appropriate measures; second, consideration of arguments existing between two or more religious communities in order to indicate possible solutions and third, facilitation of communication and strengthening of cooperation between religious communities and governmental organizations.

When the inter-religious council was created in 2011 His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia - Archbishop of Mtskheta-Tbilisi and Metropolitan of Bichvinta and Tskhum-Abkhazia, invited representatives of the religious communities that were included in the council, blessed their activities and shared his hope that they would cooperate to find solutions for the current problems existing in the state. H.H. blessed the Doctor Professor of St. Andrew Georgian University, i.e. me, to represent the patriarchate of Georgia in the council.

Since 2011, with our common work, inter-religious Council has conducted many activities and projects and the most noteworthy projects, I would like to mention today the project: "State and religion in the EU member States" (2011). It was executed due to the lack of Georgian language materials on the given subject. The monography by Garhart Rober "State and the religion in the EU member states" was translated and published in Georgia, this monography addresses different interactions between states and churches and different aspects in the EU member states. The book includes all the overview of the acts, regulating religious freedoms in EU member states, the status of financing of religious congregations, their activities within the public structures, religious education and other important issues. The publication is meant for representatives of all religious communities as well as the lawyers and experts that are interested in the aforementioned subjects from both theoretical and practical point of view. The book was published with the help of the "Konrad Adenauer Foundation", the Georgian and German foreign ministry cultural cooperation office.

In 2012, we executed the project "Protection of the freedom of faith and religion - support democracy and human rights in Georgia". The goal was to facilitate the existing dialogue and cooperation between different religious communities in Georgia within the format of Inter-religion Council. Special attention was paid to the issues existing between the Georgian Orthodox Church, Apostolic Armenian and Evangelical Lutheran Churches. This project was executed with the support of UK Embassy in Georgia.

In 2013 we organized a forum: "Religions against drug abuse". It was held in the of centre "Mental Health and Drug Abuse Prevention". The forum participants discussed the role of cooperation within the State and the role of professionals and religion and religious unions in fighting against drugs. The participants were the members of Inter-religious Council, the managers of the centre of "Mental Health and Drug Abuse Prevention", leading specialists in this area, representatives of the government and the ministries. The decisions were taken at the forum: The members of the inter-religious council and the confessions would actively work on prevention of drug abuse with their respective communities and the centre of "Mental Health and Drug Abuse Prevention", assigned quotas of free rehabilitation treatment for the members of the communities and the "Anti-drug centre" at the Georgian patriarchate offered a free psychosocial rehabilitation program for the members of communities, which had problems with drugs.

In 2014 there was an event "Religion Against Violence". Interreligious Council decided to support the ministry of internal affairs in its campaign against domestic violence. The Georgian patriarchate, the "Saint Andrew Georgian University" hosted the conference "Regions Against Violence" where the leaders of the religious communities, who are present today, worked out a roadmap, common plan to execute the real and concrete measures and a video clip was prepared and broadcasted through different TV outlets. In this video, the leaders of different religious communities express their views on unacceptability of domestic violence.

In 2014 was held the conference "Religion and Media".

Our "Saint Andrew Georgian University" hosted this conference and its goal was to improve the quality of communication between these two important institutions, identify the areas of common interest and facilitate the dialogue. Interreligious Council prepared a schedule of meeting in order to discuss and consider the best International practices in the area of religion, freedom of speech as well as legislative regulation of religion and media interaction.

In 2015 we executed a project: "Development of Democracy and Improving of Tolerance in Georgia".

The goal was to develop a tolerance and promote western values in Georgia by conducting education, public information, and outreach activities. Within this project, we:

1. Published 2 roadmaps, guidelines: first is "State and Religion in the EU member states" and the second is "International organizations and Georgia's European Choice";
2. We organized five regional meetings in different eparchies;
3. In 2015 June 23rd our University ("Saint Andrew Georgian University") hosted a workgroup: "Georgian EU integration, current situation and challenges" and the Inter-religious Council members considered the Georgia's integration process for us into the EU, the current situation and recommendations towards Georgia. At this meeting also the members of the legislature and executive branch, media, international destinations and diplomats participated in the project and it was executed with the support of the Friedrich Ebert foundation.

In 2016, the project "Meetings at Eparchies of the Georgian Orthodox Church" was held. The goal was to raise awareness on the EU Georgia integration process and NATO goals activities and NATO-Georgia relations as well as the state interaction models existing in different states, religion interaction models existing



in different EU States. In the framework of this project, we conducted 20 meetings in different eparchies of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and we prepared and published the book: "Orthodox Church in EU member States". The project was executed with the help of EU representatives in Georgia.

In 2016 until now, the project "Child marriage and Domestic Violence Prevention" is being conducted. The goal is to strengthen the support of religious communities in solving of the mentioned problem. Within this project regional outreach meetings were held with Muslim leaders and Imams, regional executives and legislators and this was conducted with support of the Muslim authority of the entire Georgia. This resulted in a conference held in 2017 where Muslim authorities in entire Georgia decided and published its official address towards the Muslim clergy, not to execute child marriages and work on prevention of child marriages. Still now we work with Inter-religious Council to activate different confessions in this area and raise awareness with the help of religious leaders to spread good message, which will help to uproot the bad practices in child marriages and domestic violence. In the framework of this project the brochure "Early marriage" was published. The forum was conducted, where the members of the Interreligious Council's religious confessions signed the memorandum of cooperation on the aforementioned issues. This project is being conducted with the assistance and support of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Georgian office.

To sum up, we can say that the Inter-religious Council has been playing an important part in the resolution of current challenges in Georgia and I would like to thank you once again for this opportunity. It will play an important role in our cooperation in this area. Thank you very much.

### INTERVENTION BY FATHER ANDRIA JAGMAIDZE, HEAD OF PUBLIC RELATIONS OF THE GEORGIAN PATRIARCHATE



Good morning. I am happy that I got this opportunity and I want to thank the Foundation (21st Century) that they organized our meeting. What Bishop Jacob said are the hardest issues, the most burning issues that tortures Georgia. I want a bit to switch the angle and talk about one important constituent or reason of our meeting. I want to make a loud statement that the Georgian Church is willing and ready for a direct dialogue on any topic and our service. I mean the public Relations Service of the Georgian Patriarchate, one of the most important directions is deepening the relationship with International organizations, including EU. The historic role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Georgian statehood is very important and this explains the trust of the people towards the church. For many centuries we lived together in Georgia, I mean the different confessions, which are present here today. I am saying this because Georgian Orthodox Church is often attacked. I would call it blackmail, as every time they say that the Georgian church is under the influence of another church or we have pro-Russian attitude, it is done for blackmailing or discrediting the Georgian Orthodox Church.

There are topics which may emerge in our relationship with the West. We understand that the fusion or connection of two civilizations' cultures is the reality of today.

The Question of LGBT community actually is splitting our society at it is very hard for the Georgian Orthodox Church to make its assessment about this issue. Let me briefly share our opinion, the opinion of the Georgian Orthodox Church on this issue, and maybe we reconcile our attitudes because sometimes the church

is alleged in violence. We think that any human being is a great treasure of God on the earth. Besides that, our church and other religions and denominations, of course have their own judgment of this event. While we mean the LGBT way of life. We say no violence, but also no propaganda. We see the reality what was happening in Georgia, under the disguise of protection of rights: it is propaganda. They actually promote propaganda, which is very divisive for the Georgian society. Very often some non-governmental organizations are actively involved of planting the western values but in reality it comes in controversy with all the religious. It's very bad because it is instigating the negative or fuelling the negative attitude among the people. Of course, it's your choice.

You have already decided this issue in your society and it is completely acceptable for us. But on the other hand when this issue is imposed or forced on us, it is hard for us to have a healthy judgment and to reconcile. This is the question where we shall be more deliberate. When the Georgian Church or other religions have their own assessment of these events there should not be allegations of being pro-Russian or subservient to Russia. This is the attitude of religions and internal assessment. It's our own judgment. We don't support violence. But we also are against propaganda. All humans deserve love. For a number of centuries our culture in Georgia developed this way. So we don't have a bias or aggressive attitude towards anyone.

Another issue which often is reason for misunderstanding is the process related to the autonomy of the Ukrainian Church. The Ukrainian Church has been established and there is a process of recognition but there are a lot of questions to be answered in this process and you know that so far only two churches recognize the Ukrainian church, Constantinople being one of them. Often our view on this issue is considered as the Russian influence. I want to assure you that that's not true. The Georgian Church lives its own life and it follows its own laws and canons. And before this matter is not decided yet, every church is in the process of waiting and this is a natural issue also done by other churches.

Bishop Jacob also mentioned David Gareji issue, which is very important. We think that the most important sanctuary for Georgians and a historic Monument today became disputable and we guess it was done artificially. There is an artificial intervention. So there may be a need for us to address you with a request to determine the truth and the justice by international standards with the historic consideration. So in the future we may need your support in clarifying this issue.

Let me also mention occupied territories. It is often said that there are no problems between two churches because we, Georgian Church and Russian Church, both are orthodox, but occupied territories highlight these ecclesiastical problems and issues very well. On our territories the church has been built, without our permission and our clergy cannot cross the dividing line. They cannot have services there and if you could help our church to achieve this it would be a very important step because our cultural monuments, our cultural heritage is being destroyed. Georgians cannot visit the graves of their relatives and family. The problem also is that the clergies under Russian obedience serve in Abkhazia. A few days ago the Georgian Patriarch sent a letter to the Russian Patriarch Kirill. Because of the military bases they sent chaplains, also in Russian military bases which are on the occupied territories. So we need more clarity with these issues and we rely on your support so that some of them can be addressed with a dialogue which will highlight our position. Thank you.



### INTERVENTION BY RAMIN IGIDOV, SHEIKH OF WHOLE GEORGIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY



Good morning to everyone. Our speech is concerning the building of trust in the conflict zones between the societies and peoples.

First of all, I would like to mention that there are some issues that unite everybody and our today's meeting is the best way to speak to each other directly and share our opinions.

We trust that religion is something that opposes anarchy, injustice and terror, violence etc. It's the best instrument.

In the United States there was a think tank that did research on the influence of religion on politics. The research was conducted in Russia and in 18 Eastern European countries, 25,000 people were questioned and it appeared that when in the Soviet Union and socialism, the so-called socialism period religions were under the big pressure from the government and later when this block was dissolved, people started turning themselves towards religion and the role of religion, the place of religion in society has grown. Today democracy exists in many countries and secularism as well. But at the same time there is also influence by religion on the society and on the political processes and we see that in the whole world this role exists.

Religion has its part when we talk about internal political issues and foreign political issues, and about the issue what influence religion has on the state considering Islam, our faith. It is one of the Holy obligations to love your motherland. We see these principles in our societies and in our peoples. They love their country and countries and support and respect their states. Our faith calls upon people to be united with their state and, if necessary, to offer their lives to the states.

Unfortunately, in different corners of the world we see processes that are connected to a wrong interpretation of religion and usage of religion for the wrong reasons; like financial reasons, personal reasons, power, etc. Religion is being used for different purposes that are not included in the goals of religion. Unfortunately, we see in many parts of the world that events are happening in the name of faith. People speak in the name of faith and they speculate with faith and this processes is bad and has a destroying effect on everybody including these persons themselves.

The goal of faith is unification of people but when person start speculating with faith, it divides people and societies and finally causes conflicts between the societies and people.

Now about our country: as you know, the religious leaders have a higher role and they enjoy more trust from people than the politicians and we try by dialogue to solve many existing problems.

In our country it often happens that the politician is saying something and those words are being forgotten. Our society had seen it for already decennia, but the speech or the words of religious leaders have more weight and we enjoy more trust from our population.

Our main message for Georgia and for the whole world is that peace has to exist and peaceful coexistence

of our communities is the main point of the dialogue between different religious leaders and different religious communities, and it has to be based on trust. It's very important.

I tried to be brief with my speech but we should also mention that Georgia is our homeland and we are all patriots of Georgia, citizens of Georgia and here it's important to emphasize in the European Parliament, that 20% of our territories are occupied by another country and we will never agree with this and with this reality. Our goal is peace, and at the same time integrity of Georgian territories, is very important for us.

Twenty percent of our body, of our country is cut off and at this moment is under occupation and we pray for peace. Of course our message is peace and our will is for peace, but if the conflict situation will exist again, we will protect our country. Thank you very much.

### INTERVENTION BY REV. FATHER KIRAKOS DAVTYAN, VICAR IN THE ARMENIAN DIOCESE IN GEORGIA, DIOCESE OF ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC ORTHODOX HOLY CHURCH



Thank you very much for this invitation and also thanks to the Rondelli foundation.

The history of the last 22 years clearly demonstrated that conflicts caused political instability not just within a given country, but also on the international level. As a result, states are dispersed and people experience suffering.

One of the main goals of any religion is to promote justice. Justice is the main cornerstone of the world peace. Peace can only be achieved with the existence of law and order, spiritual calm and harmony.

However, today different media spread anti-religious propaganda. Citizens become confused because of this: what is wrong and what is right. Also what we witness today is not the renaissance of religion, but that people with similar religious views unite themselves behind social economic or political causes. Every religion in the world, both traditional and modern, stands behind peace. Also, religious leaders play a more and more important part in international conflict resolution. History holds many examples of the above.

Throughout history of mankind, religion has developed laws and ideas that gave civilizations common goals and values. Ideas like compassion, love to a fellow human, harnessing once ego, modesty, forgiveness, obedience, human rights, accepting responsibility for one's past mistakes. Those ideas are important for both in peace building and achieving social justice. It is noteworthy that the holy texts include a huge amount of information on the peacekeeping and reconciliation as well as about the factors that influence conflicts.

We need to keep in mind that religion influences on state of minds and social behaviour of millions of people. The majority of these people currently participate in conflicts. Diplomats and mediators could benefit from understanding deep motives of violence and cohabitation, which means that interaction between different religious groups will become more productive due to understanding the choice for strategies and conflict resolution. It will become easier if the politicians will understand this.



The holiness and inviolability of life can become a source for reconciliation because the right of life represents the key value not just in the Christian world, but also in many other cultures. Furthermore, inter-religious dialogue facilitates better mutual understanding, identification of common values and mutual respect. Because it results in prevention of conflict escalation.

We cannot ignore that religion as well as family represent the second oldest institution by formulation of laws and principles of human behaviour. Religion regulates social behaviour of the human being and his or her interaction with fellow humans. This is the best way of keeping peace on earth.

Naturally, we are all different and that cannot be ignored. We need to discuss our differences, share them with each other for better understanding, for getting to know each other better.

Unfortunately, today there is a lack of love among people. However, love is number one rule of happiness. Believing in God gives people hope that everything will be all right, it leads people to love. Religion is the strongest institution, which helps human beings to find faith and love, which has positive effects.

We need to wake up and see our reality and see what is happening around us, in the world around us and not just the Christians but also the followers of Islam, true Islam are being subjected to persecution in the globalized world. Society needs to unite in face of rising challenges despite of any difference in religion and faith. We need to protect our family values, also spiritual and moral traditions of our nations, educate the young generation, so that they may accept the high moral values and build a just an equal society that gives people the opportunity to live happy lives.

Religion has always been not just the main activating force of the world but it has also played an important role in areas of reconciliation and conflict resolution and prevention. We need to sow love, solidarity, tolerance and mutual respect all around us.

May God protect us and bring light and kindness into our hearts, souls and minds and lead us to peace. Thank you very much.

**INTERVENTION BY GABRIELE BRAGANTINI, EPISCOPAL VICAR OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
IN GEORGIA, ITALIAN CLERGYMAN, THEOLOGIAN, PROFESSOR  
AT SULKHAN-SABA ORBELIANI UNIVERSITY**



Thank you very much indeed for this opportunity to let me talk about what is in our hearts and what is very important, especially since we are talking about religion or religions. We Georgian Catholic Church agree with everything what has been said about the occupied territories or other issues discussed. I refer to several statements by the Holy Father from the Holy See of the Vatican when he was visiting Georgia. Integrity of the territory is predominant. This is the step towards a stronger peace for our country. The Catholic Church in Georgia, is always supporting this situation. We, the Catholic Church, although we have a small parish in Georgia, on the top of our agenda are not our own concern (of the Catholic Community), but the issues which are more important for the state: its development or well-being. We always give preference to these issues and this is very important for us.

However, since we don't have the opportunity to speak about the developments in Georgia so often, let me open heartedly and openly talk about our parish. I'm not talking to you now on my own behalf. I'm talking on behalf of the Georgian citizens like any other citizens of Georgia. So I chose to speak about the relationship between confessions or religions.

So it may not be as urgent or hard as the occupied territories but when you have a small stone or rock in your shoe it is torturing you. It is making your life hard. I want to mention one story which is about the Catholic community in Georgia, I am saying this because I love Georgia and I want to have peace, not just like the front window, like the facade of the peace. When people don't care what's happening inside, I want to share some small facts to show the reality.

Georgia has always been and is still a tolerant country. But I think that specific facts deserve to be looked at. The Catholic Community is downsizing daily. Why? Is it an issue only for Catholics or whole Georgia? If we want to have real tolerance and if we want to have a diverse society, will it be good when there will be no Catholics in Georgia after a while? Because in some regions, there are no more Catholics (for instance in Kutaisi). The city remembers those when there were ten percent of Catholics and today there are only 42 Catholics. It's a shame that in a city, which is the second largest in Georgia, there are only 42 practicing Catholics. Shall the Catholics be blamed for being of weak faith or maybe the lack of diligence of the leaders of the community? But fact is that nobody asked this question: Why in Kutaisi are there only 42 Catholics while in former times, it was a cultural cradle. In the 19th century the strongest support in the development of Georgian culture came from Kutaisi. There are also family issues in Georgia. The tradition of mixed families was the example of which Georgians are proud but now it changed. Young Catholics who want to marry, they either have to convert to Orthodox Christianity, best men also. This is not only a canonical, theological problem like early marriages. I think that it is a social problem. Why shall there not exist mixed families? It's a big issue for us in Georgia. There are families who are afraid of the future of their children. They either do not practice catholic tradition any more or they baptize them as Orthodox. In some villages the majority were Catholics and they had a normal relationship with others. But now it's a shame to be a Catholic. Almost a shame, for example if you tell your classmates "I am Catholic". Out of the majority of such villages only a couple of them stayed Catholic. Is it good that only one Christian church or denomination will exist in Georgia? We have to cooperate for peace and there are other issues. The property issue of our churches. It is 30 years after our churches were taken away. So 30 years ago and all this time there is no interest to discuss this, either from the third sector, NGOs or the Georgian Church when we wanted to build a new church in the town of Rustavi. We built a new church two years ago, but we had to go through problems. Even when the Holy Father was visiting Georgia, they didn't even look at this fact that it was such a high visit. So if we can't take back home what belongs to us this is very hard. So what's the solution? I apologize for this open talk, but I think that Georgia wants to pursue its real tradition. What is this tradition? It is diversity. But if they want to preserve only one tradition, Georgian, equal to Orthodox Christian. So although it's not on the top of the agenda in the recent years, but still we see the outcomes when we want to start talking about this. We don't see the interest from our counterperson. Who is our counterperson in this talk: the government or the Georgian Orthodox Church?

I think we need a new attitude. We have very good personal relations but this also is a good starting point to talk on such issues, which I mentioned. So we talk to you about the balance and relationship between the majority and minority. But is this terminology coming from tolerance? Today we need a different termi-



nology. Where does tolerance come from? It may come from peace, peaceful times or war times. That's why we say dialogue and recognition is necessary. Yes. There are some Georgian citizens who are the high class or number one or second hand. In Tbilisi the situation is a paradise, it is an exemplary model situation. But if you go outside of Tbilisi, for example Kutaisi, Akhaltsikhe, Gori what's the situation there? Of course many steps have been made in the recent years and those are steps leading to the positive future. But to make it stronger and to shape it out, I think we need to look at specific aspects.

We need a new philosophy, new idea, new thinking, not to be afraid to talk about what we really need. What's the outcome if we really want to cooperate, because the Catholic Church is the oldest church in Europe. So maybe if there is cooperation, we can do many good things for our people for the better future. But it's not always possible. Yes, we mentioned it at conferences. We organized a conference meeting to discuss this issue. But, I think we need more specific or concrete cooperation. The Catholic Church in Georgia will stay and I don't know how long it will stay. But the time we have is only for peace and the country and the people. We have to remove this small rock from our shoe and throw it away. It will be much easier to walk for everyone. Thank you.

#### INTERVENTION BY MERAB CHANCHALASHVILI, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TBILISI GREAT SYNAGOGUE



Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Before I start my speech, I want to draw your attention on the issue mentioned today about the Catholic Church by the Catholic priest. Well, many of us may have these and different problems. We too, because of all the denominations, we are the minority in Georgia, but we still speak aloud. Nobody takes our voice despite of the fact that we are very few. There are regions in Georgia where there is no single Jewish person left but the synagogues still stand and nobody takes them from us and Georgian people take care of them and it is impossible not to appreciate this worthy step from Georgians. That would be unfair action by my side if I had not mentioned this fact. I appreciate this step very much! Our Jews are going to Israel. Yesterday I heard that yet another family left for Israel. It is maybe a big loss for us, but at the same time, it is a dream of all Jewish people to be in Israel. This may be a tragic reality from the history, but still a reality. We are glad with the fact that the Jews that left for Israel returned, not to live in Georgia, not to reside in Georgia, but like pensioners, they come to live out their lives in Georgia. This is good and it makes me happy.

Now I would like to start my speech with events of 115 years ago. On the eve of the last century, in 1913 and in Frankfurt during one of the big international congresses of Jewish people the delegates from Europe and Asia shared the information on different horrific facts of persecution of Jews in their countries. Spiritual leader from Georgia, Rabbi David Baazov separated strongly with the rest of the delegates and shared sensational news, which surprised the audience: 'the country where I come from, he said, lies far away in Caucasus. It is called Georgia. This is the country where the Jews have never been persecuted. Its children (Georgians) have never ravaged my people and we spent the previous 20 Centuries living in peace and brotherhood with each other'.

This statement was so different from the common context of the rest of the speeches that the chairman of the conference, French representative Général Lifmonn, spoke out as follows:

"Brothers, the brother from far away country stands in front of you. This country lies far from us, but needs to be close to every Jewish heart. Today Europe tries to promote love for fellow humans, but Georgian nation learned this lesson already two thousand years ago. The evidence is that the town of Mtskheta and its president, the town leader greeted Jews who came from Jerusalem with great feast and with open arms. He greeted them as brothers and until this day despite of all challenges and changes that this beautiful nation had to face, the idea of brothers, brotherly love for a fellow human being still lives in Georgian people...".

The general expressed many words of praise towards Georgians and finally stated: "Georgian nation can proudly say that we had the Kings, Clergy, Nobility of writing but we never had a thought of persecuting the other people. We didn't dry our dirty hands in blood shed by different European powers. These are Georgians and the country from which our distinguished guests comes from".

The Congress reacted with ovations; many people had tears in their eyes and praise hailed to Georgian people: "life and happiness to Georgians" and the general ended his speech with the words: "my children, remember to pay respect to Georgians and express love towards them as much as you can!".

This was the result of the speech delivered by Rabbi David Baazov at the Frankfurt conference. Jews are living for the last 26 centuries in Georgia. The first settlement in Georgia was the result of the invasion by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar to Israel. Furthermore, migration of Jewish groups is permanent until and including 19th century. Settlement existed in all large towns: Mtskheta, Tbilisi, Oni, Akhaltsikhe, Tskhinvali, Kutaisi, Gagra, Sokhumi and so on. Jewish formed a large part of the population in numerous Georgian villages, like: Kula, Surami, Urbnisi, Bodbe, Sujuna and others.

Georgian State policy and Georgian people themselves, were the guarantors of peaceful cohabitation of Jews.

For us, Georgian Jews and for me personally, it is an honour to live in Georgia. Personally, I think that if they needed to live somewhere else than Israel this should be in Georgia, where the day of Tolerance is being celebrated every year by traditions of cohabitation of Georgians and peoples of every ethnic origin. This is also proven by the fact that throughout the centuries people of different ethnicities and religions were praying and living side by side in Georgia. This is proven by the small quartier of Old Tbilisi, where the old temples of different religions are located side-by-side.

It is not a coincidence that the part of this city, where I was born and raised, was called small Jerusalem by the visitors of the city.

Like in many other places in Georgia, we people of different ethnicities shared one life without asking each other about their ethnic roots. However, we never forgot who we were. During the religious festivities in the, so-called courtyards of Tbilisi, we shared and celebrated our neighbours' religious holidays, and only after having done so each other's nationality was becoming more apparent.

We also solved each other's problems together. So no one actually needed to ask for help, as everybody was always ready to help one another. This tradition continues today, but due to political and especially economic problems existing in the country, citizens, no matter the ethnicity or faith, frequently come across unsolvable problems. Therefore, many are trying to emigrate in order to solve their financial problems. As a result, many families are divided, children are growing up without one or often without both parents. Espe-



cially vulnerable are the elderly people who often live and remain totally alone. These all causes alienation of family members. At the same time we know that a strong family is the fundament for a strong state.

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed. This affected Georgia and other former member states, where the collapse of previously existing centralized energy, economic and political ties, cost degradation of standards of living. These raised in the number of immigrants of every ethnic origin. In the 1990s raised war in Georgia and in other neighbourhood countries (Civil War, conflicts in Abkhazia and Samachablo, Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the war with Russia in 2008). But I can sincerely state that representatives of all ethnicities living in Georgia stood side-by-side in defence of their country. In addition, the efforts of Azerbaijani and Armenian communities in Georgia were instrumental in non-proliferation of Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict to Georgia. I would like to thank them for this.

26 years had passed since the restoration of Georgia's independence. Several governments changed, despite the fact that all the governments had different political views, the tolerant attitude towards ethnic and religious minorities was unchanged.

We applaud the decision of the government of Georgia to create a State Agency for Religion under the direct management of the head of the government. This created yet another possibility in space for dialogue between the different religious leaders. These in turn bring people of different religions closer together, making the image of Georgia as a tolerant and democratic country even stronger. Through the efforts of the Agency as well as the representatives of different denominations, the existing religious structures currently owned by the government were transmitted to the internal use of religious communities. We just got all synagogues, except 2, among other synagogues into unlimited use. That 2 synagogues are still working in progress. The format is acceptable for today. However, I think that the state should prepare an act to make a transfer of the rights of property to religious communities possible. Also the Tax Code and Customs Code should be amended in order to create equal rights for all religions.

In 2014 upon the initiative of the State, the country celebrated the 26th Century of the first Jewish settlements in Georgia, and in 2015 the 100 years Jubilee of Oni synagogue and in 2017, 275-year Jubilee of Akhaltsikhe synagogue.

Also, I have close working relationship with the Religious Counsel of Tolerance Centre within the Ombudsman of Georgia.

At the same time conflicts caused enormous moral, physical financial problems of all citizens of Georgia: one example is that we, members of Jewish Community, cannot enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia to visit synagogues located there. According to our information, these synagogues were damaged or destroyed during the armed conflict. We are extremely concerned about the fact that we are not allowed to visit and take care of the graveyards of our relatives and friends that are located in the region. I would like to inform you that according to the searches of the beginning of 20th century we, Jews formed more than 50% of the population in town of Tskhinvali. We know that the representatives of other religious groups in Georgia are facing the same kind of problems.

As we know the states do not choose their neighbours. History placed us and our neighbours next to each other. We are saying that "neighbour is better than a good relative, because neighbours hear of your troubles sooner and are able to help you sooner than anyone else". We call upon the politicians, both in

the country and outside, to seek out every opportunity to find common ground with every neighbouring country and upon the people in order to establish good neighbourly relations. We need to seek out the road that will bring us together and not take us apart. This is easily achieved if you respect one another's dignity, recognize one's right to choose one's policy and religion. And the main condition, however is respect for one another in equal rights, and we need to remember that we are all sons and daughters of the same God. I find that the history of multi-ethnic and multi-religious cohabitation in Georgia is a very good example to illustrate what has been said.

Now, I would like to say that I don't often talk to NGOs, because I see a tendency that they are often mercantile. They also have financial, subjective interests, but Rondelli Foundation is a discovery for me, as they clarified everything objectively and that they gave me the possibility to come here and to talk to you played a very important part and I would like to thank them for this. Thank you very much for your attention. Thank you.



**WEBINAR ON FIGHTING THE EFFECTS OF COVID IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**  
**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**  
**9 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**INTERVENTION BY H.E. BISHOP ALFRED AGYENTA, ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NAVRONGO-BOLGATANGA, GHANA**

**INTRODUCING THE UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA**



The Upper East Region of Ghana lies on the border between Ghana and Burkina Faso. It has a total population of 1,273,677 and forms part of the Catholic Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga.

The region has one of the worst climatic conditions, prone to periodic drought and flooding. The population is mostly rural and agrarian and depends on rain-fed agriculture which makes it already very vulnerable even in normal times.

The effects of Covid-19 on Ghana as a whole, have been enormous and have particularly worsened the plight of the Upper East Region.

**This presentation is being done in two parts;**

In the First part, I will deal with the effects of Covid-19 as have been felt in Ghana in general and in the Upper East Region in particular, where I live and work as a Bishop.

The Second part will tackle the role of the religious communities, and in particular the role of the Catholic Church, in Ghana in the fight against the effects of the pandemic.

The presentation will conclude with a brief note on the way forward in the ongoing fight against the effects of the pandemic and the expected contributions of religious communities in the country.

**1. THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN GHANA**

The effects of Covid-19 on the developing world have been quite enormous, even though not as publicised as in the case of the developed world. The very first case of the Covid-19 in Ghana was reported in March 2020 and within a couple of weeks the virus had spread to almost every part of the country. The result was a devastating effect, especially in the following four areas.

**a) The Health Sector**

As at 4th September 2020, the number of infected persons stood at 45,012, the number of those who have recovered from the disease stood at 43,478 and the number of deaths at 283. Resources to run the hospitals and Clinics in the face of the pandemic have been severely stretched, especially in the area of Personal Protective Equipment for the health workers and other frontline workers. While it is comforting to note the relatively low number of deaths reported so far, it is distressing when it comes to other sectors of life in the country; the effects of the disease in these other areas have not been so merciful.

**b) The Socio- Economic Sector**

Within the last seven months an estimated number of 41,952 Ghanaians have lost their jobs and livelihood, whilst about 77,124 have had to live on reduced salaries owing to the collapse of businesses and companies (cf. Ghana Statistical Service). In this situation, the hardest hit have been those who earn their living by daily wages either on the streets and or in the markets.

There have also been reported cases of stigmatization and discrimination suffered by victims of Covid-19 where people who recovered from the disease have experienced difficulties of reintegration into the society and social life.

**c) The Religious and Spiritual life**

Ghana is a very religious country with about 70 percent of the population being Christian and 15 percent being Moslem. The COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized most religious communities in the country with the imposition of restrictions on social gathering and public worship. The inability to gather and pray together, which is a vital source of spiritual strength for believers in times of distress, put a heavy strain on the resilience of the population to fight the disease and its disastrous effects.

More particularly stressful for a majority of the population was the psychological and spiritual trauma of not being able to be close to their loved ones affected by the disease as well as not being able to hold decent funeral and burial ceremonies for those relatives who sadly succumbed to it.

The ban on public worship and social gathering also meant the inability for most religious communities to mobilize resources in the form of donations and gift offerings for the work of charity and support to the poor and vulnerable in their midst.

**d) The Education Sector**

The closure of schools and other learning centres throughout the country, owing to the pandemic, has had a negative impact on the lives of our school children.

With the lockdown and the subsequent closure of all educational institutions in the country, a lot of children have lost their learning opportunities. Not many children in the north of Ghana and particularly in our region could afford the luxury of an online teaching and learning facilities even if these were available.

Some of the most disheartening effects felt in our region owing to the closure of the schools include cases of teenage pregnancy and early marriages involving school girls during this period. It has also been discovered, with the limited reopening of some of our schools, that a considerable number of children have permanently dropped out of school!

Mention should also be made here of the noticeable rise in domestic violence suffered by children during this time as families struggled to cope with the consequences of the pandemic.

**2. THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN FIGHTING THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN GHANA**

It should be noted that religious communities, most especially in developing countries, remain a beacon of hope for the people, especially in times of disaster and conflict. In this regard, the religious communities in Ghana were among the first to respond to the pandemic when it struck the country. The role played by religious communities in Ghana has been threefold, namely spiritual, material and advocacy.



### a) The Spiritual contribution of religious communities

This is by far the most important role played by the religious communities in the country. By nature, this is what religious communities are noted for and what they must do. With their spiritual resources, religious communities can make a difference in the lives of people in distress and ravaged by fear and anxiety as we have witnessed in the last couple of months in this country.

Among others, the spiritual contribution that religious communities have made and continue to make to the country are, first and foremost the offering of prayers and petitions to God for deliverance and protection of the population. It is in line with this that during the month of May the Catholic Church in Ghana joined the universal Church at the invitation of Pope Francis to say special prayers for an end to the pandemic through the recitation of the rosary. Besides, several national days of prayers and fasting were jointly organized by the different religious communities in the country, a visible sign of interreligious collaboration, to pray for an end to the pandemic.

Secondly, religious communities made every effort to provide spiritual care to COVID-19 patients as well as accompany bereaved families during this difficult time when elaborate funeral and burial rites have not been possible.

And, thirdly, in order to cater for the spiritual and pastoral needs their members and indeed, the general public, religious communities made use of radio, television and other social media channels to reach out to them.

### b) The material contribution of religious communities

The devastating effects of Covid-19 created a humanitarian crisis in Ghana. Most religious communities also made a very significant contribution in this area. Besides contributing to the Government Covid-19 Trust Fund set up to fight the disease, the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference had its own National Response Plan for Covid-19 which is meant to run from April till December 2020.

Areas of direct intervention by religious communities in the fight against the effects of Covid-19 have been evident in the following areas; in the Health Sector, there was the acquisition and distribution of Personal Protective Equipment, such as face masks, hand-washing equipment, sanitizers to the Hospitals and clinics for the protection of all health workers, their families and the clients who come to the health facilities. In addition, some religious communities made some of their buildings available to the Government to be used as isolation centres for COVID-19 patients.

In the Socio-Economic sector, most religious communities helped to deal with the humanitarian crisis by providing hot meals to the poor and vulnerable families, especially during the lockdown period. Others provided food items such as maize, beans, groundnuts etc to the poor and the needy through their charitable service organs such as Caritas Ghana, which is the Integral Human Development Wing of the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference and the St Vincent de Paul Societies working in most catholic parishes throughout the country. In our own little way and through the benevolence of a number of people and organizations, the Catholic Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga was able to mobilize and distribute a considerable amount of food items to the poor and needy in the Upper East Region.

In tackling the problem of unemployment caused by Covid-19, it is also worth noting that the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, through Caritas Ghana, has embarked on a programme of entrepreneurial skills-training for street hawkers and vendors whose livelihoods have been badly affected by the pandemic.

One major contribution by religious communities in this sector has been the creating of awareness among the population about the dangers of the disease and the need to strictly observe the safety protocols of handwashing, the use of face masks and hand sanitizers. In this regard, one can testify that our churches and most places of worship have become the safest places in the country to be because of the strict observance of the safety protocols demanded by the religious communities. Admittedly, enforcing compliance with the

safety protocols in the public spaces remains a huge problem in the country.

In the Education Sector, with the gradual reopening of some schools throughout the country, and in order to supplement Government effort, some religious communities are providing personal protective equipment for the use of teachers and students in their schools. In the wake of the disastrous consequences visited on our school children by Covid-19 religious communities are also embarking on programmes of intervention to trace and rescue children who dropped out of school so as to offer them the opportunity to learn a trade and become self-reliant. A similar effort is being made to ensure the safety and health of those school girls who became pregnant with the hope of getting them back to school after they have given birth.

### c) The Advocacy role of religious communities

In every age and time religious communities play advocacy roles in the societies in which they find themselves. They are very conscious of their special mandate to protect the common good of all. In this regard, in the wake of the COVID-19 and its attendant challenges and opportunities in Ghana, religious communities have been actively engaged in the following initiatives.

First of all, there has been a conscious effort made on the part of the religious communities in Ghana to cooperate and supplement the efforts of the Government in the fight against the devastating effects of the Covid-19. Religious communities see themselves not as competitors to national governments but as partners in working for the common good and welfare of the citizens. This explains why religious communities have made enormous contribution alongside the Government towards the alleviation of the suffering of the people.

Secondly, fully aware of their religious responsibility to ensure the safety of everyone in the country, especially during this time, religious communities have not failed to warn the Government against political and civil activities in the country that carry with them the potential risk of exposing the population to infection by the coronavirus.

Finally, in view of the possible temptation to misuse or misapply the resources meant to fight the effects of COVID-19, religious communities have continued to exhort the political and civil authorities concerned to ensure probity, transparency and accountability in the utilization of the resources and every support they have received on behalf of the people and which is meant to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in the country.

## CONCLUSION

The Coronavirus does not seem to be going away any sooner and so the fight against it must continue and be intensified.

In this light, religious communities must continue to play their unique role of providing the population with the necessary spiritual and pastoral care to enable them face the crisis with enduring strength and resilience.

Secondly, we must endeavour to continue to educate and conscientize the population, especially in the rural areas about the gravity of the disease and what they must do to protect themselves, most especially by observing strictly all the safety protocols prescribed.

Thirdly, the provision of Personal Protective Equipment for our health workers must also remain a top priority of our religious communities. Experts say if we want to defeat the virus, we must place a high premium on protecting ourselves, and for this to happen the availability of personal protective equipment is crucial.



Fourthly, securing the future of our young people, especially those girls who became pregnant or got married at a tender age during the closure of our schools is another priority area for religious communities. These secondary victims of COVID-19 cannot and should not be abandoned to themselves or to their families.

Finally, we will always have the poor with us. In the present situation where Covid-19 has worsened the condition of these vulnerable individuals among us, religious communities must continue to stand by them, ensuring that they have adequate food and medicine to see them through these difficult times.

### INTERVENTION OF ARCHBISHOP MUHEIRA, NYERI ARCHDIOCESE, KENYA



The rule of a safe community in the Church is to make the heart speak, and to somehow facilitate the communication with God, but also provide a deeper speaking, especially when circumstances around had paralyzed us, or the noises around seem to silent our kinder conversation. This means responding to questions that then arise in these deeper conversations and facilitating a human conversation and response one to another of solidarity, care and fraternity.

When COVID hit China and then Europe in January 2020, it was still viewed as something foreign in Africa. Then Italy crushed, and the scale of the calamity was revealed, Africa was awakened. When the measured of lockdowns were enforced, and the ban of gatherings especially the closing of public worships, the African alarm was sounded. People had a mix of feelings: “anxiety”, “fear”, “uncertainty”, “confusion”, “desperation”, “suffering” and slowly also “grief” as the reality of people suffering and dying started coming to us.

When many human institutions, like technology or finance power, we were relying on crumble, the faith communities were called upon to provoke and spark the goodness in humankind to rise to the occasion away from the technical and material surroundings, and rediscovered their meaning.

In Kenya, the cases now are close to 35.000, the number of deaths is about 600, and those recovered about 21.000. Over 90% of people suffering from covid are asymptomatic. However, they are effects that are going to be with us for a long period.

First, is the economic effect. Upon the imposition of a partial lockdown, the Economy sector stalled: Business, production, and the financial power in the hands of the citizens or the ordinary persons was cut off, there was no cash. This meant that institutions that depend on a very short frame of cash flow, had to close and even employees were laid off without being paid. The middle class is who supports most of the economy. The informal sector accounts for 83% of labour force. 25% of these businesses have run aground. 1.7 million Kenyan have lost jobs due to COVID, totalling 4.7M jobless. Total labour force is about 20.5M. (20%) The closing of all learning institutions brought a new turn to the situation. They provide market for goods. 2,000 private secondary schools and 8,000 private primary school: totals about 150,000 teachers were laid off without salary and with no income to support their families.

Second, other effect is the human effect. When there is no income, that means shortage of food, also in the sense of the chain of production. They are average families starting to struggle to have food. There is an emergence of a new poor with no food, yet form the middle class. The poor are even in more desperate

situations. The result is an increase in stress and psychological problems of the families. Students have been sent home because of the closing of schools and have been in the past months locked in. At the same time, the uncertainty of staying home for up to 6 months brings depression, and even for some of them suicidal feelings and feelings of rebellion. The young people at home, has also provided a market for drug peddling and other immoral attractions offered to remove their boredom.

In addition, there are also religious effects of COVID19. COVID has revealed the vulnerability of our society, in spite of tremendous progress. On the one hand, the desire in this moment to seek for Divine intervention was cut by the closing of places of worship. While people are suddenly finding themselves without any line of hope, and that was a very serious problem for the ordinary people, and especially for religious people. It also made people re-examine the role of God in our overly secularized and materialistic society. Death and sufferings open people to the transcendent. However, with the closing of public worship, people had nowhere to seek recourse.

Nevertheless, in situations of distress and hopelessness, it is the deeper convictions that keep the people going. That is why the role of Churches and Faith communities is essential. They give a message of hope that can only be understood within an atmosphere of Transcendence, of God who cares for us. In spite of other things to need to be done to address the illness, the heart must be consoled with this message of hope. The Church is a messenger and safeguard of hope in hopelessness, of faith in incredulity, and of love in situation of strife. Our response to the crisis was first at the faith level, to maintain the connectedness with God when usual lines were cut, and to maintain God’s presence through actions of solidarity and charity.

The first response was the spiritual response. In the situation of people in their homes, we had to bring the message of Christ, and message of hope to their homes, so we rediscovered the power of the media. We negotiated the TV coverage 4 or 5 hours of Sunday Masses which continue today 6 months down the line. Another use was the Radio FM stations: Sunday messages and weekday messages in over 10 Catholic radios and 10 secular radios every Sunday, sending messages of hope and civil education. At the same time, we did live streaming on Facebook and Youtube, things that perhaps we did not think that much about their power in reaching people and giving them positive messages. And then, one very interesting area was the birth of the Interfaith Council that works together in a spirit of Interreligious Dialogue, it is an amazing show of unity.

The second response was the apostolate response. In I our office we set a specific team to manage this apostolate called CRAT (COVID Response Apostolate Team), that was meant to look at which opportunity, which people are abandoned, what can we do, what is the message we could send. Everyday we send a 3 minutes message clip of hope through the Whatsapp that reaches out around a 100,000 people, addressing the various current issues including civic education on COVID. In addition, Outreach and Bishops established ZOOM meetings with youth. Catechesis in Whatsapp, with a moral response to youth with weekly messages.

As a human response, we have been taking different initiatives. One is called Hope4u Initiative to “feed a needy family”. Community fund raised 320,000 Euros and helped up to 7,000 families. These people are identified in the villages, hungry and miserable people, and then we send them money that can keep them eating for one month.



Another initiative is Good Shepherd Call Center. When we see people stressed, that want to commit suicide, families that are fighting abuse in families, we have a free call number. Anyone can call anytime; we have a group of volunteers, most of them priests and also psychological counselors. It has assisted over 800 people. Then, youth sports and competitions, to meet the idleness of youth, and online classes and skill lessons.

Finally, also the reconnection with God. People have been shocked. How can we reconnect them with the need of God? For example with the Novena of Eucharistic procession in the Archdiocese, campaign of Confessions and zonal visits with teams of ten priests to every corner of the villages, speaking with them about the need of deepening charity, care and mercy.

## WEB-CONFERENCE ON "THE NEXT DAY IN SYRIA: HUMANITARIAN EXCEPTIONS TO EU SANCTIONS AGAINST SYRIA: WHY THEY DON'T WORK OUT?" 11 NOVEMBER 2020

### INTERVENTION BY THOMAS HEINE-GELDERN, EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT OF AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED INTERNATIONAL ON "THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS IN SYRIA"



Your Excellencies, honourable Members of the European Parliament, reverend Fathers, ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you for the invitation and the privilege to inform you about our view on the humanitarian situation in Syria in context with the EU sanctions for Syria.

I can assure that our presented view is based on the practical experience of our work as a Catholic charity in Syria.

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has been working through the Catholic Church in Syria since 2011 to provide humanitarian support to the Christian population. Through the generosity of our private donors we have been able to spend over €40 Mio to finance several aid projects.

In September 2019, I had the opportunity to inform the EU ambassadors to the Holy See of the situation in Syria during a conference hosted by the EU Delegation in Rome. The Apostolic Nuncio to Syria and three witnesses we brought over from the country attended this meeting. We together had the opportunity to give a clear and very disappointing picture of the humanitarian situation and the enormous difficulties to provide help to the starving and homeless civilians - difficulties, which were also based on the ongoing sanctions of the EU and the USA. During the discussion after our presentation one of the ambassadors stated clearly that the sanctions provide a series of exceptions and exemptions which should facilitate and enhance humanitarian help.

Immediately after the conference, we commissioned a broad research of the already existing exceptions and exemptions. And the findings of this confirmed a very impressive list of such provisions within the sanctions.

However, I have the sad obligation to inform you that since the meeting of the ambassadors the situation has not improved. We all know now the theoretical existence of ways and approaches to make humanitarian help possible, but we have also seen that the practical application of these exemptions and exceptions makes this help nearly impossible. There are too many obstacles.

Before I list these examples I would like to draw your attention to the overall situation within Syria and the neighbouring countries:

**The general effect of sanctions:** prices of imported goods have skyrocketed, while salaries of the average worker have declined dramatically from an average of US\$150 per month to US\$50 per month. Despite embargos, it is possible to buy everything in Syria but this promotes the black market, the blooming of organized gangs and a real mafia profiting from the smuggling of embargoed goods over the borders of neighbouring countries.



**The consequences of the Syrian situation for neighbouring countries like Lebanon:** Due to the catastrophic circumstances in Syria there is very little desire of the 1,5 million refugees, overstaying their welcome in Lebanon, to return home. This is heavily jeopardizing other EU policies seeking to help Lebanon, especially after the blast and during the pandemic. The high number of Syrians has dragged down the Lebanese labour market and therefore increases the poverty and the decline of the general health of the population. The refugees will not leave Lebanon as long as the prospects in Syria do not improve. The first step to an improvement would be to ensure that the foreseen exceptions and exemptions of the sanctions are respected and so humanitarian help can flow in this devastated country.

Based on our experience I would like to indicate to you, ladies and gentlemen the most important and up to now unsurmountable barriers for the so badly needed humanitarian help:

**The factual blockade of money transfer to Syria:** Albeit that the sanctions foresee exception for money transfer related to humanitarian help, it does not work. The European IBAN and American SWIFT banking codes block operations carrying any reference to Syria and any city within Syria. Consequently, it becomes almost impossible for charitable organizations to transfer funds for humanitarian purposes for the needs of the suffering population. If money is sent to neighbouring countries, it is brought in cash across the border, which is risky and dangerous. The banks seem overzealous. Consider this collateral impact: payments to the Syro-Malabar Church in India are sometimes blocked, because part of its name contains the word Syro and yet it has nothing to do with the war in Syria. Our bank in Germany advises us to avoid too many attempts to transfer money to Syria, as this might bring us on a black list.

Why is it so necessary to make the money transfer possible? Church institutions and NGOs do not have the capacity to ship the needed goods for the survival of the IDPs and the other 14 million Syrians inside Syria, so we normally send money for our counterparts to buy the food, medical help and clothing locally. (This also supports the local population by providing employment).

**Legal fees:** Amid this chaos, our partners, i.e. mostly members of the Catholic Church seeking to provide humanitarian aid, are presented by the sanction authorities with often unsurmountable, multilingual procedures of application for permits in distant offices to import basic material. Licences for exemption involve high legal fees and a licence is needed for every project, no matter how small. (Many donors prefer small projects because the situation is so precarious). Specific licences are needed for every transaction involving “double use goods” such as spare parts for hospital equipment resulting in added costs, financial difficulties and long processing delays.

**Transport and insurance difficulties:** most international shipping companies avoid travel to Syria, requiring multiple shipments first to neighboring countries. Insurance providers predominately refuse to insure shipments.

**Basic food for infants,** powdered milk: There is acute and chronic malnutrition of children from 6-59 months. A basic product such as a tin of milk costs 3,000 Syrian pounds, while the average wage is 30,000 Syrian pounds (US\$55) and with most of the population affected by unemployment, there are just not sufficient funds in a family to buy this important nutrient for children. Aid to the Church in Need provides funding for powdered milk for children under the age of 10 but obstacles are imposed against this basic humanitarian good because powdered milk for infants is considered a “dual-use” good for repression. European transport companies refuse to transport the collected milk arguing that it could be used “for other purposes”. There is a very broad definition in sanctions of dual use goods.

**Fuel:** Notwithstanding the international embargo, oil is bought and sold regularly to those who can afford it in Syria. In the meantime, the majority of the population – the poor - remain without heating or light in winter.

So you see that numerous challenges arise when applying the humanitarian exceptions and exemptions. On paper the sanctions contemplate manifold exemptions and exceptions to supply the civilian population with goods necessary to survive, but in the application of these alleviations prohibitive and complex difficulties arise.

Therefore allow me to formulate the following

### Suggestions

**Instruct the banks to accept money transfers** for humanitarian aid. We will adhere to protocols, but they must be created and implemented soon.

Clarify the application process to all stakeholders. There are difficulties to identify with certainty which activities are clearly legal and those which are not. Companies offer legal advice concerning sanctions but often demand high fees and are thus not affordable for smaller project partners. Authorities should provide more specific, targeted and concrete interpretative and operative guidelines and Q&A documents to both humanitarian actors and private sectors. Consider accessible local contact points/info points.

**Actors in the private sector need to be encouraged:** The private sector is critical in providing financial, insurance and transport services but considers humanitarian actors to be “high risk”. The private sector needs to receive assurance from those applying the sanctions that it will not be the subject of any type of punishment or be seen as “suspect” or potential law violators. Any measure to create a favorable and positive environment for the private sector to be considered as a “socially responsible” actor when supporting humanitarian actors should be encouraged.

**Reduce the complexity of procedures and protocols.** Simplification of procedures, e.g. concerning the “double use goods” such as spare parts for hospital equipment. Here it has been suggested that providing a general license for named NGOs could be an interim solution.

**Prioritize humanitarian requests over other types of requests.**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is our duty to provide help to the suffering civil population of Syria - and especially to the Christian minority rapidly fading away. In their name I beg you to reconsider the present international legal framework and enable us to do our work.

Thank you for your attention!



## INTERVENTION BY ŽELJANA ZOVKO MEP, VICE-CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Honourable Mr Barrios Prieto,  
Dear Mr Olbrycht and Mr Hölvényi  
Dear colleagues,  
Dear ladies and gentlemen,



Thank you for granting me the floor. I am pleased to be with you this afternoon to discuss the impact of humanitarian sanctions on the Syrian population and in particular, why the exemptions on these sanctions for humanitarian purposes are not as constructive as they should be.

The Syrian conflict is one of the darkest events of the world's recent history. More than 5 million people have fled their country. About 500 000 (five hundred thousand) people died and millions of citizens are internally displaced, lost their homes and live in inhumane conditions.

On many occasions, the European Union has shown its support for the citizens of Syria. At one side, it is the biggest donor of humanitarian aid. Over €20 billion has been allocated by the EU and its member states since the start of the conflict in 2011. At the other side, the EU acts against the Syrian regime by implementing restrictive measures targeting individuals responsible for the violent repression of the civilian population in Syria, as well as individuals or entities associated with them.

Unfortunately, the wide impact of the measures also affects innocent citizens and humanitarian aid workers. The export to Syria of certain goods is prohibited, the Syrian banking system has collapsed and the price of natural resources such as oil has skyrocketed. One solution to ensure the work of the humanitarian organisations is via exemptions. As there is no global sanction mechanism, there is also no harmonised system of exemptions. Some exemptions are implicit, some need authorization, and for some the European member states are individually responsible.

Stakeholders and authorities interpret the terminology "humanitarian" different. On top of that, other global actors beyond the EU have their own conditions. I deeply deplore that obtaining licenses for a derogation is confusing, time-consuming, and costly for most humanitarian workers.

Maybe the worst of all consequences is the so-called "chilling effect". Companies are reluctant to assist humanitarian organisations, even in instances where no license is required. The fear that their services or products will end up in the sanction mechanism has a deterrent effect.

And as I mentioned before, citizens face difficulties with the sanctions. It is a sad constatation that the cultural and religious minorities, are even double-hit. The flow of resources has declined, financial aid to the Syrian refugees is only rarely directed to Christian minorities.

In Syria, aid is often distributed through the 'governmentally approved agencies' with almost no inclusion of Christian NGOs on the list. Muslim-NGOs distribute aid mostly to their own religious fellows first. Even in the newly allocated funds by the Commission in May 2020 no funds were allocated to the cultural minorities.

The European Union, its member states and all stakeholders urgently need to improve the effectiveness of the sanctions and exemptions mechanism. A key principle in humanitarian aid is trust and understanding. Let this also be a guidance for the competent authorities.

If we can already think today about possible solutions, I strongly believe that by addressing common challenges of interpretation, scope and utility, the main pitfalls of the system can be mapped. Based on this information, humanitarian organizations should be assisted in the preparation of the application for licences and funding. Before they start their operations, humanitarian actors should clearly set out all the relevant programme activities which may result in a need to seek a derogation. This way they avoid unexpected difficulties.

Last but not least, the need for continued dialogue at the international level should not be underestimated. There are many areas where international bodies, governments, banks, humanitarian actors and other stakeholders can usefully share experiences and ensure synergies.

In the light of the global corona pandemic, the EU already proposed a new approach for humanitarian aid in Syria in May this year. The tool should speed up the channeling of equipment and assistance to fight the coronavirus pandemic in Syria. All actors involved are addressed, from authorities of EU Member States to public and private operators.

This innovation should be welcomed and I hope we can see the positive results soon. In addition, I would like to call on the European Commission to update the dimension of this guidance in order to cover not only corona related assistance, but all humanitarian sanctions and exemptions. Only this way we can fully and truly support the Syrian population.

Thank you.

## INTERVENTION BY REV. RIAD JARJOUR, PROTESTANT SYRIAN PASTOR, FORUM FOR DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE AND DIALOGUE (FDCD), BEIRUT, LEBANON



Excellences,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
First many thanks to the EPP Group Intercultural Religious Unit for organizing this conference.

I have been invited here today to discuss the impacts of the EU sanctions on Syria and talk about why these sanctions are not working and to describe the devastating impacts they have had on Syria and its people. Ultimately, all international parties have the same goal – to reach a peaceful resolution to the Syrian civil war. It is only when this happens that Syrians will be able to once again live in peace, security, and social justice.

Syrian people after 10 years of civil war are facing the worst humanitarian conditions in recent history. Sanctions only serve to further harm both the economy and humanitarian aid. Syrians face a situation of deeper poverty, food insecurity of acute malnutrition now, more than ever before! In fact, many Syrians describe life during the height of the conflict as easier than life now, because at least they could eat.



When we speak about sanctions in Syria and if they are effective, we must first look beyond Syria to the larger context in the Middle East, because the socio-political situation in Syria's neighboring countries directly impacts Syria's ability to reach a peaceful resolution. The Middle East region is in turmoil at present. A few Arab countries have normalized diplomatic and economic relationships with Israel. The economy in Lebanon has deteriorated, and the government fails to adequately support the millions of Lebanese now living in poverty as the tense political situation has almost reached a dead end. The war in Yemen continues to devastate the country. All of these regional conflicts – especially the economic crisis in Lebanon – have ripple effects that place an undue burden on Syrians. Sanctions on Syria by the UN, US and Europe have only added to this burden and made Syria's case a catastrophic one!

The European Union sanctions on Syria, which started in 2011 till now, have not yielded their objective in making the Syrian government and Syrian government ministries change policy or sit at the table for negotiations that lead to a peaceful solution! In other words, the question is whether the sanctions are not accomplishing their primary objective, but instead are affecting the daily life of the Syrian people and making it more miserable even more than the civil war time.

Sanctions are not working yet in changing government policy... Instead it is working against the well-being of Syrian people. It would be useful to conduct a study on sanctions once imposed on countries in Eastern Europe to see how those influenced the political situation in these countries. Think of sanctions imposed in recent years in Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Cuba, and so on. What effect did sanctions have on these countries? Did it affect government behavior? Or only the people?

Lifting sanctions on Syria is likely to take time, maybe many years of diplomatic negotiations, confidence, building steps. It will not be easy at present with other countries involved, Russia, US, Turkey, Iran and others. So to be realistic, sanctions are affecting mainly the people of Syria.

Millions of Syrians are refugees outside Syria, millions of Syrians are displaced inside Syria, tens of thousands of Syrians, mostly youth, are running away to Europe and other countries. Tens of thousands of Syrian Christians have left Syria and the rest are ready to leave, which leaves Syria without a strong Christian presence and Syria's mosaic of religious diversity will be gone.

Sanctions have left Syrian people without petrol, gas, no electricity, worst economic conditions and even no bread! In many areas people wait for hours to have bread, to have fuel, and basics to enable them to live in a bit of what I may call human dignity!

Although sanctions are not supposed to halt humanitarian aid, we see in Syria that the implementation of this policy is faulty. Sanctions do end up preventing humanitarian aid from being delivered to Syria. In the attempt to stop business operations in Syria, many humanitarian imports are blocked from entering the country. Additionally, many NGOs source the material aid they distribute from local vendors in order to support the local economy. Sanctions impact vendors' ability to import basic necessities, and so they are then unavailable for NGOs to purchase.

Talking on sanctions means we also must address the issue of the potential impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19), in Syria. A staggering 11 million within Syria are in need of humanitarian aid. 6.2 million Syrians are displaced and need shelter, sanitation, food. Syria's health sector has been seriously weakened due to the

war, and new sanctions imposed in 2020 have made it difficult, and in many cases impossible, to purchase medicine and medical supplies. Thousands are dying due to the Coronavirus... are these not human beings that deserve to be treated better? Finally, let me borrow a scenario proposed by a study of the Carter center... for sanctions to work...

The EU lifts most sanctions in response to political reforms... Could the EU offer a significant lifting of sanctions in exchange for a specified political reform?

Sanctions are not working... let them work through negotiation enabling reforms, peace and security and decent living of the Syrian people. I am sorry to say that the recent Caesar Act made things worse! No one, even Lebanon, dares to help Syria or Syrians access basic items to help them live.

My friends, the people of Syria at the moment are at risk, they, if I may say, can't breathe! Their lives matter!  
Thank You



**VIDEO CONFERENCE ON “PREVENTING AND COUNTERING  
RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN EUROPE”  
24 MARCH 2021**

**INTERVENTION BY GYÖRGY HÖLVÉNYI MEP, CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE WORKING GROUP  
ON INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**



Your Excellencies,  
dear Vice-President Metsola,  
dear Members,  
distinguished guests,

1. I am pleased to welcome you to our meeting on Preventing and countering religious extremism in Europe.
2. With this event, we wish to commemorate the 5 years of the Brussels bombings back in March 2016. Also, we wish to bring together MEPs and representatives of religious communities and academia to discuss about the current challenges of fighting religious extremism, specifically in Europe.
3. I can still exactly recall the morning of the explosions that shook Zaventem airport and then the subway station Maalbeek on 22 March 2016. The attacks left 32 people dead and more that 300 wounded.
4. I immediately felt that the attack on the Islamic State was a milestone, after which neither the city nor the Union would be the same as before. Suddenly, it became obvious: extremists must be acted upon right away, even if it is difficult to think with the heads of these people.
5. Today, we discuss the chances of action against religious extremists in Europe with Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious representatives who are very experienced in this field.
6. I am delighted to welcome among us
  - › Roberta Metsola, EP Vice-President,
  - › Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, Chairman of the Rabbinical College for the Netherlands
  - › Imam Hassan Chalgoumi, President of the Association of Muslims of Drancy
  - › Fr. Xavier Chavane, Catholic Parish Priest and episcopal delegate for relations with Muslims in the Diocese of Versailles, France.
  - › Fr. Nicodemus Claudius Schnabel OSB, Director of the Jerusalem Institute of the Görres-Gesellschaft
  - › Also a special greeting to our colleague Francois-Xavier Bellamy, Delegation leader for France at the EPP Group.

Thank you all, for accepting to contribute today!

7. Before opening the floor, let me underline a few points. In most European countries, religious extremism is growing. This is of course mostly started by extremist groups, ever more aggressively present in our societies.
8. What can we do? I am sure that authorities and politics must be in constant touch with moderate religious leaders. We must engage them in peace building in society, as our Group has been trying already for many years. While the agenda of the religious extremists is to polarize people based on religions,

- Churches can isolate the acts of the extremists and indeed unite society.
9. Also, we must tackle the economic shortcomings, which are among the reasons for social instability and the rise of violent extremism. This is a task of politics but faith-based organisations can make here a great contribution as well.
  10. The need for engaging, understanding and dialoging among faiths is becoming the most urgent need. There are of course great efforts in this respect, still the good intentions must be reinforced every time.
  11. Finally, we must recognise the basic importance of faith-based organisations' work on the social field. We must make sure that they are recognised as full partners for European action for preventing terror.

This situation places a very special responsibility on Europe and our institutions. I am therefore extremely pleased to have today's discussion.

**INTERVENTION BY JAN OLBRYCHT MEP, CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE WORKING GROUP ON  
INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**



Your Excellencies,  
dear Vice-President Metsola,  
dear Members,  
experts and distinguished guests,

I think the topic is extremely important and urgent. I would like to underline one element, that very often we discuss as politicians only. But what about the conflicts around the world? Are they caused by religious extremism or are there other reasons? However, extremism is the only element that is shown. I think today's meeting is not only about conflict and terrorism, but this is also the question of religious extremism. Is extremism something negative or can extremism be something that can be accepted? The topic of today's conference is how to prevent religious extremism but what do we mean by that and is extremism by definition negative? That is why the Dialogue is for: to give answers. I would like to wish you a very interesting meeting and I am waiting for all the comments on the matter.

**INTERVENTION BY ROBERTA METSOLA MEP, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
FORMER FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (2019 – 2021)  
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 17. OF THE LISBON TREATY**



Your Excellencies,  
dear Members,  
experts and distinguished guests,

Thank you for inviting me. Extremism is a phenomenon that has been raising its ugly head for quite some time. It has consequences like every action. European history teaches us of the depth man has sunk in the name of extremism and ideology. More recently, we saw attacks in Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Germany and Gdansk. And it is not only physical violence



and terror, but we are also seeing the rise of hate crime, impunity on social media and online. I believe that Europe must remain the voice of solidarity, beyond our shores. I am glad to be part of this event and platform that will discuss the thin line between religious and political extremism.

The answer to the increase of radicalisation is not to question the values on which the EU is built. We need to be sure we have all the legislative tools that we need to dismantle and prevent radicalisation within the communities without watering down fundamental rights. This is a fine balance between what we call 'ensuring security' while at the same time 'ensuring freedom'. One of the hardest lessons from the attacks in Europe was that our information sharing capabilities are still not fully utilised. Europe really cannot afford to play catch up. Radicalisation of any kind, whether online or not, is one of the toughest challenges that our enforcement agencies face. We need Europe to have all the resources it needs, and we need to come down harder, much harder, on those who preach hate and use religion as a disguise for their message of evil. It is not only about law enforcement, but we also need a new approach to the process of integration in our societies. – it is a two-way process of respecting people's rights but also respecting European values.

This connects directly with EU's wider objectives of Antisemitism, combating Anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination. Religious minorities and communities should feel safe practicing their faith with no fear of attacks or discrimination. Extremism, terrorism and radicalisation are all sides of the same coin. Terrorism may well still cast its shadow on our life, but it must not define it. It is our determination to continue to live our lives despite the threat of terrorism, which will show the true character of Europe. Finally, we cannot be afraid to speak out on this issue; we must not shy away from demanding better. Thank you very much for the attention, I am looking forward to the discussions of this event.

**INTERVENTION BY RABBI BINYOMIN JACOBS, CHIEF RABBI OF THE INTERPROVINCIAL CHIEF RABBINATE, CHAIRMAN OF THE RABBINICAL COLLEGE, THE NETHERLANDS**



*How do we prevent religious extremism?*

Before I can give an opinion on that at all, we will first have to ask ourselves how we define religious extremism. And who determines the definition.

It is explained in the Talmud that when the diagnosis of a disease is known, the patient is already half cured.

This means that as long as the disease is not clear, it is only very difficult to work on a medicine. Covid-19 is a clear example of this. As medical science gains more insight into the nature of Corona, drugs are slowly emerging. But when the disease is only known as a disease, but the exact origin and especially the core of the disease is not clear, combating it is a difficult job.

I myself try to live completely according to the rules of Torah and Tradition. I believe that every Jew should live like this. Does that mean that I think that a fellow Jew is wrong if he / she has a different opinion about it and therefore, does not submit to the 613 doctrines and prohibitions that Judaism prescribes?

Yes, I do not believe that is correct.

But: do I believe that he or she is not a good person? Absolutely not!

Adhering to the laws or not is not linked to whether or not they are good or bad.

An example: a child grows up in a family where both father and mother are both members of the local mafia. The child, as it gets older, comes to understand that this way of life is wrong and it manages to break away from the vast majority of the mafia lifestyle, let's say 90%.

Another child is brought up in an environment in which father and mother work day and night to help others in need. This child, when it is older, becomes an extremely fanatical follower of his parents and shows 100% good behaviour.

Which of the two children is «better»? Child two never commits a violation, child one does as 10% of his actions fall under the category «bad».

And yet I can imagine that if child two emerges into adulthood, it will score significantly better than child one.

Not true. Child one has fought, reached 90%, had to work hard on himself and has succeeded extremely well. Child two did indeed live 100% well, but had inherited that attitude to life from home. In fact, it has performed little.

But should we now accuse child two of extremism because it lives 100% well? And what is good? So, Judaism actually says that we humans have no power to judge that. And so defining extremism, and thus combating or preventing it, seems to me a difficult, if not impossible, matter.

Is extremism really linked to religion? Are there non-religious extremists? In my view, it is incorrect to link extremism to religion almost by definition. I am often asked how I raise my children. «Orthodox, eh?» My answer is invariably: yes, I give them an orthodox Jewish upbringing. And I hope and I pray that my descendants will continue to follow the direction I have followed.

But I also hope that the education my children receive is not compulsive. But, I say to the questioner who was concerned about the education of my children. "How do you raise your children?" And usually I get the answer: "I give them freedom!" To which I invariably respond: "Madam, do you know that can also be quite compulsive!"

In other words: extremism is not necessarily linked to religion. However, as we often see in today's society, religion is frequently used as the arena for fighting conflicts that have nothing to do with religion in fact.

So, we must certainly fight extremism, but first we will have to find a definition for extremism that is an overarching definition and that applies to every way of life, including the secular way of interacting with each other and that definition will have to indicate boundaries that relate to the relationship of man and God and which equally apply to the relationship between people.



In the Pirké Avot - the ethics of the Fathers - the question is asked, «What is the right path that a person should take in his / her life?» And the answer, «The way that is good for the person who walks in the way and that is appreciated by all who meet him.» Clearly!

Clearly? Not entirely of course, because cunning governments and / or malicious dictators can convince people that killing dissidents or people with a different skin colour is good for yourself and good for the wider society. See as an example the Nazis in Germany, where Goebbels taught the population that the murder of Jews was beneficial in all respects.

Or look at the Apartheid policy in South Africa. Whites were convinced that black fellows were inferior.

Another problem that extremism can raise is the dogma that your ministry is the only correct one and therefore, all mankind must adopt your religion. If that is not possible, then it is not good, because the end justifies all means!

Judaism sees the world as a car factory. There is a team that works on the bodywork, another team is running the engine and another team is making sure that the car gets wheels and tyres. And so everyone has their own specific task to ultimately make the car drive. The world is a collection of peoples and ways of life. Together we have the task of helping the car, brand name «society», move forward, each based on its own contribution.

Judaism does not require the Gentile to become Jewish. You can, but it is discouraged. An occasional overflow from one shift to another does not harm production. But if a whole team gives up its specific assignment, then we immediately get a car with, for example, a super engine, but without wheels.

But what if religion considers all creatures to serve Him in the way their religion dictates. Is it acceptable for them to try to repent? In my opinion, that cannot be prohibited, but a limit will have to be indicated by the government. If religion or any other ideology calls for the killing or harm of dissenters, legal action must be taken. Not only when it comes to an act, but especially when it is taught to the youth.

I heard one of the Chief Rabbis of Israel answer when he was asked when he expects peace in the Middle East. His answer was: as long as millions of textbooks still cultivate hatred against Israel, you can forget about peace.

Some years ago there was a Syrian at my house. He told me he was brought up knowing that Jews had to be killed. He just didn't know whether Jews were people, animals, or things. Tolerance must be taught at a young age. The wrong pruning of a young sapling results in a seriously deformed tree.

In short:

- Extremism could be seen as intolerance of dissenters
- Extremism is not only found in religions but also in secular and other ideologies
- Religions are regularly used as an arena to settle wars / conflicts
- Freedom of religion must also have limits if they do not allow for dissenters
- The textbooks should be kosher so that tolerance is taught from an early age

## INTERVENTION BY IMAM HASSAN CHALGOUMI, PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE IMAMS OF FRANCE, DEAN OF THE DRANCY MOSQUE AND PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIMS OF DRANCY, FRANCE



Good afternoon, everybody! I would like to wish a good celebration to my Jewish colleagues and Muslims, as in a few weeks we will have Ramadan celebration. Thank you for your invitation and for the initiative on high European level. I am glad we can tackle those issues.

Unfortunately, for way too long the states have been minimizing and have been closing their eyes on religious practices that were radical. Islamism and Political Islam is what I call those practices. The attacks hit Paris and numerous other European countries; we must not simply be the witnesses of those dangers. Every citizen is at risk, whether they are Jewish, Muslim, Christian or other religion. More than 1000 victims died in the name of Islamism, in the name of a minority that uses Political Islam – not Spiritual Islam. Recently, 7000 youngsters left to war camps and join ISIS, making terrible acts towards Christians in the East, towards both women and men. I believe we have to work to prevent and counter radicalisation, to work against these small groups who take Spiritual Islam as a hostage.

First of all, to prevent and counter radicalism and extremism, we must train Muslims, as intolerance is the enemy. Intolerance hits many youngsters who have a poor knowledge of religion. It is easy to make them intolerant. It is why we need, Imams and religious people to be trained in Europe. Recently, there has been an initiative to train Imams, it is such a positive idea. We need informed Muslims, informed Imams. We also need European references that are not linked to Anti-Islam, but we also need the help of politicians and political will. We need to protect our future. The Imam has an impact and influence on the community and is listened by Muslims. This is what we need to focus on training of Imams in Europe. We need a training that respects the values of Europe.

The second aspect is education. We need to educate the parents of the youngsters. They are the first school of children. It is sad that there are still extremists killing Jewish people in the name of Islamism, which has nothing to do with Islam or with most of the Muslims. Education is key. We need to implement tools that support the parents to educate their children. Youngsters keep leaving their countries to become radicalists and join ISIS. A protestant has been beheaded by an 18-year-old. The role of the parents is important, they need to take care of the education of their children. They are working to give proper life to their children, but moral education is also important.

The third aspect is the digital era. The EU can do a lot with Google, Facebook and other social media to fight the influence and impact of social media. Social media should unite us, not divide us. Social media is not supposed to convey hate messages. There are thousands of groups linked to Islamism, hundred of tweets – these messages are sent because these youngsters have family issues and can be easily convinced by what they find on the internet. We must, as Muslims, fight Islamism and extremism. We must have more visibility and show Spiritual Islam and not Political Islam, which is influenced by foreign powers who want to destabilise Europe.

The fourth aspect is actually my dream. I have been working with Imams against terrorism. We toured Europe, we went to Belgium, Germany and France – we went to numerous places, we wanted to show our be-



longing to Europe. I call with my heart and mind for the consciousness of Europe. We need political figures to give freedom, to fight foreign interference. We have a controversy regarding the Mosque of Strasbourg – the municipality is investing 2.2 million Euro, and it is a political responsibility. We must have free Islam. I would like to welcome the Abraham Agreement and other peace agreements, like Peace Agreements with Israel and positive initiatives. These could have positive influence on youngsters. Because there is still antisemitism, hate for Israel – we must value, highlight and support such initiatives. Thank you very much.

**INTERVENTION BY FR. XAVIER CHAVANE, CATHOLIC PARISH PRIEST AT THE «SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL» PARISH CHURCH IN SARTROUVILLE, EPISCOPAL DELEGATE FOR RELATIONS WITH MUSLIMS IN THE YVELINES DEPARTMENT, DIOCESE OF VERSAILLES, FRANCE**



Mon point de vue sera celui des cités de banlieues qui sont des petits concentrés de ce qu'est notre humanité et de ce qu'elle devient.

On y remarque l'importance de la religion : les croyants sont largement majoritaires et parmi eux les musulmans sont les plus nombreux, ce qui vient bousculer le paysage religieux français où la religion avait été largement reléguée dans la sphère privée et uniquement privée au cours du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, même si la France reste le pays aux 40 000 clochers et aux 100 000 calvaires.

Le choix français de « l'intégration à la république une et indivisible » plutôt que le communautarisme permet en effet de voir se rassembler dans un même lieu, une cité, la diversité du monde sous toutes ses formes. À Aulnay-sous-Bois, sur une assemblée de 500 personnes un dimanche ordinaire on avait recensé 45 nationalités différentes originaires des 5 continents. Beaucoup de personnes ayant fui leur pays d'origine soit pour des raisons économiques, soit pour des raisons politiques se retrouvent. Parfois aussi pour des raisons religieuses, comme cette famille copte d'Égypte ou quelques familles chrétiennes pakistanaïses qui fréquentaient l'assemblée évoquée.

Pour un prêtre c'est passionnant de vivre sa mission dans ce contexte qui lui permet d'avoir un cœur qui bat au rythme des habitants du monde et qui essaye de servir la communion dans la complexité de ce monde. J'ai vécu cela ces 24 dernières années à Sartrouville (6 ans), dans le quartier de la Rose-des-vents d'Aulnay-sous-Bois (5ans) et aux Mureaux (13 ans).

Notre monde est complexe et douloureux et la situation des réfugiés qui viennent chercher l'espoir en Europe en sont les témoins. Les cités nous racontent cette réalité qui jusqu'aux émeutes incontrôlées et difficiles à comprendre de 2005 étaient ignorées par tous, sauf peut-être par l'Europe qui avait initié un programme ambitieux de rénovation urbaine.

Dans ce contexte la question religieuse et celle du fanatisme islamiste se pose. Là aussi la question est complexe et douloureuse :

- › Larmes de ces mamans chrétiennes qui voient leurs enfants se convertir à l'Islam car leurs amis musulmans sûrs d'eux et beaucoup plus nombreux leur parlent d'une religion qu'ils comprennent quand ils

ont du mal à se retrouver dans la piété de leur maman pour qui ils ont par ailleurs un immense respect.

- › Douleur et colère de la communauté chrétienne d'Aulnay-sous-Bois qui voit régulièrement un tag représentant une tête de cochon sur le mur de son église avec en sous-titre : « à mort les ... »
- › Incompréhension de ce nouveau curé des Mureaux, prévenu par son prédécesseur de ne pas ouvrir la porte de l'église qui donne sur la cité, car sinon il risque de recevoir des cailloux jetés par les enfants, et qui constate que cela arrive lors de ses premières permanences dans cette église.
- › Humiliation des jeunes chrétiens à l'école ou au lycée devant leur incapacité à répondre à leurs compagnons musulmans qui leur demandent d'expliquer le mystère de la Trinité, la messe ou quels sont les commandements de Dieu et qui dans ce domaine ne reçoivent aucun soutien de la part du corps enseignant laïc, dont parfois ils sentent aussi le mépris.

Face à ces constats douloureux, nous pouvons nous réjouir de voir que la question religieuse est bien présente et fait partie de la vie quotidienne des habitants, quand dans d'autres lieux domine l'indifférence. Nous pouvons aussi entendre plusieurs appels : celui pour la communauté chrétienne de témoigner de la joie de croire en un Dieu qui s'est fait proche des hommes en Jésus-Christ et qui ainsi est venu leur parler d'homme à homme, comme un ami parle à son ami.

La réponse des chrétiens d'Aulnay face à ce tag provocateur et malveillant fût d'ouvrir davantage les salles paroissiales à l'ensemble des habitants du quartier pour qu'ils découvrent que ce lieu est au service de tous, fût de signifier davantage son identité chrétienne par la mise en place d'une belle croix. Ils ont aussi organisé une procession dans les rues de la cité avec une statue de la Vierge Marie, chantée dans toutes les langues, avant qu'elle soit déposée dans l'église. Ils ont dans le même temps posé une bannière qui 20 ans après n'a subi aucune dégradation autre que celle du temps : « la fraternité bâtit la Paix ». Ils ont multiplié les rencontres et les échanges avec les jeunes adultes musulmans du quartier, rencontres où on parlait de Dieu et de la prière, où on portait aussi ensemble les soucis des habitants de la cité. Le tag a disparu...

Aux Mureaux, le prêtre est parti à la rencontre des enfants et des jeunes du quartier pour leur dire simplement qu'il était là aussi pour eux et quelques années plus tard suite à une assemblée paroissiale est venue une association de jeunes adultes chrétiens « Le Rocher » pour proposer des activités et des accompagnements tous azimuts aux habitants et aux enfants du quartier. Les chrétiens ont aussi rendu plus visible leur lieu de culte qui ressemblait davantage à un gymnase ou une salle municipale de l'extérieur par la création d'un proche sur lequel est posée une Croix et inscrit : « Dieu est Amour ». Les cailloux n'ont plus été jetés... Aux Mureaux, au début des années 2000, la ville était considérée comme un des foyers du salafisme en France; aujourd'hui elle est devenue exemplaire sur ce qui peut se vivre en terme de dialogue inter-religieux: actions communes auprès des plus démunis, lutte avec les familles contre la radicalisation de certains jeunes, rencontres régulières autour d'imams, de prêtres et de pasteurs de la ville pour découvrir ensemble les messages du Coran et de la Bible, visite une fois par an des lieux de culte par les élus et les habitants de la ville, cafés philos pour les jeunes des cités une fois par mois et cafés des femmes tous les jeudi matins, deux initiatives organisées par l'association le Rocher. La mairie rassemble de temps en temps autour d'un comité éthique les responsables religieux pour aborder toutes les questions concernant l'éducation (notamment la situation des décrocheurs : jeunes ayant abandonné l'école), sécurité, justice, solidarité. Cette dernière initiative permet aux communautés religieuses d'être vraiment considérées comme des partenaires dans la recherche du Bien Commun.



Sur les vingt dernières années j'ai vu grandir l'influence des courants liés aux frères musulmans, notamment autour des frères Ramadan, ou au salafisme, via internet. Oui le Whahhabisme, un islam souvent hostile à tous ceux qui ne pensent pas comme lui, est de plus en plus présent. Mais dans le même temps, j'ai vu le développement des mosquées qui elles, pour la grande majorité, sont dominées par le Malekkisme qui est, dès son origine, beaucoup plus consensuel. Grâce à ces mosquées, peuvent se développer des espaces de dialogues et de rencontres, qui sont autant de contre-feux contre le séparatisme et permettre aussi dans un dialogue entre elles l'émergence lente d'un Islam compatible avec les valeurs de « la République une et indivisible » qui elle aussi est une réalité qui ne cesse de se transformer et qui aujourd'hui doit faire évoluer sa façon de vivre la laïcité pour que celle-ci devienne un espace de rencontre et de dialogue entre tous au service du Bien Commun.

**INTERVENTION BY FR. NIKODEMUS CLAUDIUS SCHNABEL OSB, DIRECTOR OF THE JERUSALEM INSTITUTE OF THE GÖRRES-GESELLSCHAFT (JIGG) AND DELEGATE OF THE PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY SANT'ANSELMO IN ROME FOR THE «THEOLOGISCHES STUDIENJAHR JERUSALEM», FORMER ADVISOR FOR «RELIGION AND FOREIGN POLICY» IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL FOREIGN OFFICE**



Good afternoon, everybody! I would like to try a different approach. Speaking of religion always goes to either it being a problem or solution. Let us change the topic and talk about something close to our heart - about football. If we focus on that, we can see that we often play the same game with religion that we do with football.

Let me put it this way - people who criticise religion are like the people who criticise football and say: "A world without football is a better world. Football means alcoholism, violence, corruption, etc."

The defenders of football would proclaim that the game is good for health, for connecting people and that a world without football would be a poor world.

Critics would then say: "But look at the stadiums, look at fans throwing bottles and want to hurt other people. Face it, that is what football is all about."

The defenders would then answer: "That is not the real football. They have nothing to do with us."

And I think the same is with religion. I am frustrated with people saying that religion is 100% a problem or 100% a solution. I am a priest, I am a monk, and I am convinced that religion is a good thing. But as football has a hooliganism problem, religion also has the same problem. We have to make it clear that the hooligans of religion are not the definition of the religion. Hooligans are part of football and football is facing them as an issue - religion should do the same. We have to face the religion hooligans.

Football hooligans are not there for the game. They are drunk, they cannot follow or enjoy the game. It is about we and the others. I am part of one group and the others are the enemy. In religion, the same principle can be applied. Hooligans of religion offer identity of me against the others.

Religions are either responsible for the evil-doings or are a victim as we have antisemitism and other hatred-centred movements. But religions are not only about that. They are a broad-peace tool, and they stand for mercy and reconciliation. Religions are so much more than that, as well. Religions can offer more than a peace message, as they are also responsible for society. 84% of mankind are religious, a great majority. We often forget that our continent Europe becomes more and more secular. But that is not the case for the whole world, as some states do not have discussions about secularisation.

Religions have a very important role. Religious literacy is also a very important aspect. I see too much religious illiteracy, to be honest, in Europe. Because religious literacy not only prevents from violence but offers much more. I will give three points why religious literacy is of great importance, issues that could easily be resolved by it.

The first issue is the rise of nationalism. We and the others. My nation and people are first, everyone else is second. All religions are transnational. There is no religion in a cage of national borders. All religions have experienced to be in a majority situation but they can also play a part in a minority. All religions are world religions. Religions are the first source of transnational knowledge and competence. I can give an example with my homeland: The Holy Land. The Holy Land, speaking of Israel, Palestine and Jordan. All Christian communities there have bishops. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem includes Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Cyprus - one bishop is in charge of a territory that goes beyond borders. Working beyond borders, especially in the Christian communities and in a region where borders are incredibly visible.

The rising of ideologies is the second issue - where religions can offer a "healthy ideology". "Healthy idealism" is the opposite of any ideology. Ideologies are being used to gain money and power. All religions use their "healthy ideology" to always take care of the poor and people in need. Religions have no hidden agenda, no political or economic agenda.

Third and last point is politics. The political field is clear - you are elected for a short term; you are looking for some gain and you have no time to execute real solutions. In religion, there is no feeling of 'temporary'. Religions have perseverance. If we look at serious topics like climate change, the religious field often produces long-term solutions. For example, the Patriarch of Constantinople - called the Green Patriarch. He has been dealing with climate change longer than anyone else.

I can give many more examples, but I will end here on a note that: "dealing with religions is the best vaccination against all forms of extremism. Hooligans of religion give easy answers, they explain the whole world in 90 seconds. Religions give a taste of how tasty complexity is. That is the basis of dealing with religious extremism."



## WEBINAR ON ANTISEMITISM IN EUROPE 11 MAY 2021

### INTERVENTION BY DR. FELIX KLEIN, FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONER FOR JEWISH LIFE IN GERMANY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTISEMITISM, GERMANY



Ladies and gentlemen,

The extermination of European Jews, the Shoah, is the single most difficult part of Germany's heritage. Today, preventing a repeat of history and accepting responsibility for this legacy are part of Germany's national ethos and the task of all its democratic parties. Yet violence against Jews has been increasing for several years, both in Germany and throughout Europe.

In Germany, 16 per cent more antisemitic crimes were committed in 2020 than in the year before. Since the attack on the synagogue in Halle on Yom Kippur 2019, nobody can ignore the deadly dimension that antisemitism has even today.

The Council Declaration of 6 December 2018 on the fight against antisemitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe, which has 16 action areas, offers us guidance for combating antisemitism in Europe. It is our task to bring these action areas and topics to life.

Katharina von Schnurbein will be with you shortly to report on the activities of the EU Commission that aim to achieve this.

During Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2020, we EU member states agreed to mainstream the prevention of and fight against antisemitism in all its forms, a commitment that applies at every level of government and across all policy areas at local, national and European level. I am very pleased that our Europe-wide conference in September 2020 yielded the European Council Declaration of 2 December 2020. (15,7% laut PMK-Statistik.)

We can see just how relevant and how adaptable antisemitism is if we look at two phenomena in particular: anti-Israel antisemitism, and the growing prevalence of antisemitic conspiracy theories related to the coronavirus pandemic.

We repeatedly see explanations that include typical antisemitic stereotypes, such as the assertion that a secret global elite is attempting to further its own political and financial interests at the expense of huge swathes of the population.

Antisemitic tropes related to the pandemic are particularly widespread within the QAnon movement. This conspiracy theory, which originated in the USA, has gained ground in Europe and Germany due to the coronavirus pandemic. At its heart is a belief in the existence of a satanic, paedophile elite that is working behind the scenes to enslave humanity so it can take over the world.

It is mainly Jewish individuals and groups, or those characterised as such, who are claimed to be part of this secret group, such as the Rothschild family, Bill Gates, George Soros, the finance industry and Zionists in general. The QAnon myth also includes classic antisemitic narratives such as apocryphal tales of ritual sacrifice, or of a Jewish global conspiracy.

In Germany, the measures in place to fight the pandemic, in particular the debate over vaccination and alleged compulsory vaccination, have been key catalysts for those who believe in the conspiracy. Demonstrations against the coronavirus measures often include adherents of the QAnon conspiracy. Such people were among those who occupied the steps of the German Reichstag building in Berlin last August. 4

What is unusual is that these protests involve groups from all walks of life: peace activists, a range of left-wing extremists, New Age groups, and people who are generally against vaccinations, alongside right-wing populists and right-wing extremists. Antisemitism is the glue holding these highly varied groups together.

In addition, content about the pandemic is often shared on German language social media, with state measures described as part of the conspiracy to achieve world domination.

This shift of conspiracy theories into the digital realm is an ongoing trend which has further increased during the pandemic. There are countless groups, accounts and individuals active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, as well as video platforms, producing, disseminating and consuming content that promotes antisemitic conspiracy theories.

The second phenomenon that we can also see increasing is anti-Israel antisemitism.

Few other topics elicit such emotionally charged public discourse. At what point discourse concerning Israel becomes antisemitic is a subject of constant debate. In this context, we should also be asking ourselves why Israel is always the focus of public debate.

Israel is subject to relentless, often disapproving scrutiny like no other country in the world. There are groups among the public in Europe and Germany who have an almost obsessive fascination with what is going on in that small country. They put the conflict with the Palestinians front and centre any time Israel is mentioned. This particular conflict seems to overshadow every other conflict in the world.

Why is this the case? Why is Israel such an emotive topic for Europeans?

Why focus so vehemently on this conflict, rather than on other large or small conflicts in the world, many of which are crueller, more unjust, bloodier and more radical than the conflicts in Israel and the Palestinian territories? Why is the spotlight always on this small democracy, the only democracy in that region of the world?

My view is that the same sources of hate still exist, but the target of this hatred has evolved throughout history. The mass murder of European Jews has created an association with Judaism and therefore with Israel which does not exist for other countries and population groups.

This association is tinged with guilt and deflection of guilt, by projections and by everyday antisemitism, which unfortunately did not vanish into thin air following the Holocaust. Anti-Zionist antisemitism and an-



ti-Israel antisemitism are different labels for the current form of antisemitism which, in contrast to other forms of antisemitism, has achieved an unusually high level of consensus in Germany and parts of Europe, and which shapes public discourse on the topic. In this discourse, Israel, as representative of the Jews as a whole, takes on the role that antisemitism assigns to Jewish people, putting them outside of a supposedly natural order. Israel is the Jew among states, making it a surrogate target for antisemitism.

Because open antisemitism is largely taboo today, antisemitic sentiments are concealed behind purportedly justified criticism of Israel and Israeli policy. Antisemitic clichés and interpretation patterns which are associated with long-established antisemitic images are often hidden behind coded language.

Obviously not every criticism of the Israeli government and its policies is antisemitic. Such criticism becomes antisemitic when the stereotypical accusations, symbols and images from the traditional antisemitic repertoire are applied, or when Israeli policy is equated with National Socialist policy with the aim of victim-blaming.

Criticism of Israel is also antisemitic when it holds all Jews around the world responsible for Israeli policy, when Israel is held to standards that are not applied to any other democratic country, or when the State of Israel's right to exist or to defend itself is called into question.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must make it our aim not only to eradicate antisemitism from the public discourse in our countries, but also to ensure that antisemitism no longer exists as part of people's mindset.

To achieve this, we will need not only perseverance, but also an extensive network of actors from both government and civil society.

My role as Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Anti-Semitism was created by the Federal Government in 2018. The creation of this office was intended as the first step in strengthening this type of cooperation.

In my first two years in office, we successfully created structures and networks to ensure that knowledge from four different fields can be systematically and continually brought into the fight against antisemitism.

These four fields are

1. the perspective of those affected by antisemitism,
2. the experience of NGOs,
3. current research findings,
4. and the knowledge and experience of those who play a mediating role among the first three fields in their professional life and are able to share their knowledge.

All four fields require close cooperation between government and civil society to put the exchange of knowledge on a permanent footing.

The attack on the synagogue in Halle on Yom Kippur in 2019 showed the urgent need for reliable structures for linking and disseminating knowledge so that prevention measures can be developed in a targeted way. Establishing clear responsibilities and ensuring that knowledge is shared between structures are of primary importance for this.

Because of the federal system of government in Germany, almost all of the areas where action can be taken to fight antisemitism fall under the responsibility of Germany's 16 federal states. That is why we have developed a decentralised structure of institutions, which I coordinate:

The most important forum for exchange between the federal and state levels is the permanent joint federal and state commission that I cochair. All of the state-level antisemitism commissioners are also on the commission, which serves as a forum for exchanging information. At the same time, it is also an interface between governments and the public administration on the one side and NGOs representing civil society, especially those affected by antisemitism, on the other side.

Our second forum of exchange is an (also permanent) group of independent advisers including experts from the academic community, civil society and organisations representing people affected by antisemitism.

I meet regularly with this group, which enables knowledge to be shared among different levels and to flow into political action.

The third platform within the larger network is the interministerial group which I convene regularly and which provides for exchange among ministries as well as preparing and debriefing the meetings of the joint federal and state commission.

Given the broad range of fields of action in the area of combating antisemitism and hate, from civic education and a culture of remembrance to research topics, such a forum is especially helpful for legislative initiatives. Staff continuity through the assignment of fixed contact people for the fight against antisemitism at the ministries ensures that knowledge is transferred and the forum continues to function well.

Our fourth tool, which aims to shed light on areas where information on antisemitic attacks and incidents is currently lacking, is the nationwide reporting system which we are currently developing.

According to a study published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), four-fifths (79%) of those surveyed who had been a victim of antisemitic harassment between 2013 and 2018 said that they had not reported the incident because they thought that they "wouldn't change anything." This means that the rate of unreported antisemitic incidents is very high. Then there are incidents which are not considered criminal offences, but which nonetheless impact the quality of life of Jewish people.

That is why we have set up a federal association of offices for reporting antisemitic incidents to document such incidents even when they are below the threshold of criminal prosecution in Germany. This reporting is based on standard criteria applicable nationwide. Our aim is to establish reporting offices in every federal state, so that we have a presence on the ground. We also plan to offer counselling to those affected. So far there are nine reporting offices working in accordance with the federal association's standards, and another one will be beginning work soon. The underlying institutional structure differs among the fede-



ral states; what is important is the independence of the supporting civil society organisations and their connection with local communities, to increase the willingness to report antisemitic incidents. The data gained from reporting help to tailor preventive measures to specific needs. Many reporting offices also work with the state criminal police offices to compare data.

Targeted project and research support enhances our experience and expands the basis of research findings informing our prevention work.

My public relations work also builds on all of the measures I have mentioned and brings this knowledge to the general public.

Because antisemitism affects each and every one of us: not only is it a threat to Jewish people, but also to the very foundations of our democracy. It is therefore essential that we win over the silent majority of decent people to support our work.

Fighting antisemitism is a task that cuts across different government levels, policy areas and professions. This applies both within Germany and in certain areas of EU policy. It requires the establishment of long-term governance structures. The approach to strategies and measures must be more consistently comprehensive and interlinked. This must be our goal.

Thank you very much!

#### INTERVENTION BY HANNA KALMENSON, EXECUTIVE MANAGING DIRECTOR AT B'NAI B'RITH EUROPE



Distinguished Members of the European Parliament, panelists, colleagues, guests,

I'm very grateful to be here today and I would like to thank the entire EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, for organizing this webinar on antisemitism. I would also like to thank the previous speakers for their contributions; and express deep gratitude to the European Commission Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism and fostering Jewish life Katharina Von Schnurbein as well as DG Justice as a whole for their continuous work and their progress on this issue.

B'nai B'rith Europe's mission is fully aligned with today's theme. It includes the fight against antisemitism and enhancing knowledge of the Jewish presence in Europe.

I would like to briefly share with you my personal background in order to explain what has built my perspective. I was born in an orthodox Jewish family and grew up in a religious environment in France, near Paris. About 10 years ago, I revisited my belief system and experienced my Jewish identity through diverse angles. Intercultural dialogue was a key element in my journey. It allowed the integration of concepts specific to my own culture, through the mirror held up by the others.

Therefore, addressing the topic of antisemitism within the framework of intercultural dialogue means a lot to me.

I will start by sharing a few examples of the impact of antisemitism drawn from my personal experience and my professional research. I will then show how fighting antisemitism could be turned into a contribution to

society as a whole. Finally, I will elaborate some areas of action and present ongoing projects.

Apart from direct and frontal attacks, antisemitism can also be experienced through the use of stereotypes and insults that are part of everyday vocabulary such as "Fais pas ton Juif" or in English: don't be such a Jew.

People often don't realize that when they use an insult related to a Jewish stereotype, even when it's humorous, they are reinforcing discrimination.

I have never been insulted and called a dirty Jew like my son has, nor have I been stoned like my friend who was on his way to the synagogue, in Brussels, on a Saturday morning. However, I remember that as a child I would clearly feel a difference between being in a public space with my mother, who as a woman displayed no recognizable signs of Jewishness, and being there with my dad, who wears a beard and a Kippah. I was then looked at with curiosity and sometimes with animosity. This had a direct impact on my sense of security.

In fact, when I chose my children's names, I wondered how they would feel about being identified by their Jewish names and whether this would make them targets in certain circumstances.

Today, depending on the news, I can be on alert when I shop in a kosher supermarket.

Sometimes, people do not realize that they experience a certain form of violence, because it has always been part of their daily life. Acknowledgement is the first step to repairing discrimination. It instills a constructive and a resilient dynamic, and it is true of discriminations of all kinds.

If we look at the reactions of people who have been victims of antisemitism, many will minimize the facts. Others will speak of a vicious circle: by reacting and pointing out that a remark is antisemitic, they reinforce the cliché that Jews see antisemitism everywhere.

I would like to share a point about clichés. The cliché often reflects the need or the fear of the person stating it. For example, if a person states that Jews are too protected by the police, they often feel that the police is not protecting their own community enough.

A cliché highlights a specific need for equity. The difference between equality and equity is that equality is giving the same rights to everybody, while Equity is giving each person what they need in order to be successful.

Recognizing one discrimination does not minimize others. On the contrary, addressing discrimination in its specificity could contribute to the reduction of all inequalities. Therefore, we must address this issue by building bridges between the different communities.

Sharing Jewish culture allows to deconstruct stereotypes by changing the narrative linked to Jews.

For instance, Judaism has nothing to do with the Shoah or antisemitism.

Jewishness is a philosophy. It is traditions, customs and religious practices. It's a kind of humor, a language, food, but also music and arts. It's a rich intangible cultural heritage that is fully integrated into the European identity.

I would like to mention The European Days of Jewish culture, a project of AEPJ, the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage, an organization founded by B'nai B'rith



Europe among others. It highlights the diversity and richness of Judaism, through a festival which takes place each year, all around Europe. The theme for this year's edition will be dialogue, which leads me to my last point.

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue can take place in many settings: schools, sports clubs and also through religious education.

The involvement of religious leaders is crucial. They have the responsibility of identifying stereotypes that may be conveyed through the way their faith is transmitted. Emouna, an organization founded in France, trains religious leaders for dialogue and inspired such trainings in Belgium and The Netherlands.

I would like to underline that even if intercultural dialogue does exist in Europe today, it should not only preach to the converted or address only the politically correct topics. It needs to be broadened and deepened.

A research we conducted the past few months shows that intercultural and interreligious projects are often initiated by communities with their own funds and reach only a small part of the society.

To achieve goals, dialogue must be institutionalized at all levels of governance. In many European countries, dialogue is not integrated into school curricula yet and does not benefit from substantial budgets. Moreover, there is no appointed political position specifically dedicated to this topic.

To conclude, I would like to share with you one of the values that has been engrained in me since childhood. I was taught that it is not about fighting a problem but about overcoming it, by developing more strength. In this way, a problem is transformed into a source of evolution and renewal.

I will now give the floor to Melissa from CEJI, who will present a project we are currently working on together, with the support of the European Commission. It is the NOA project which stands for Networks Overcoming Antisemitism.

Thank you for your attention.

### INTERVENTION BY MELISSA SONNINO, COORDINATOR OF FACING FACTS, CEJI - A JEWISH CONTRIBUTION TO AN INCLUSIVE EUROPE FACING FACTS COORDINATOR AT CEJI - A JEWISH CONTRIBUTION TO AN INCLUSIVE EUROPE



I am Melissa Sonnino and I work as Facing Facts coordinator at CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an inclusive Europe. Today I would like to briefly share with you CEJI's experience as Jewish organisation working on all grounds of discrimination, including obviously antisemitism and I would like also to provide some insights on how inter-cultural and religious dialogue can be built into the anti-discrimination work.

CEJI stands with people of all backgrounds to promote a Europe of diversity and respect. A Jewish voice at European level, our activities include

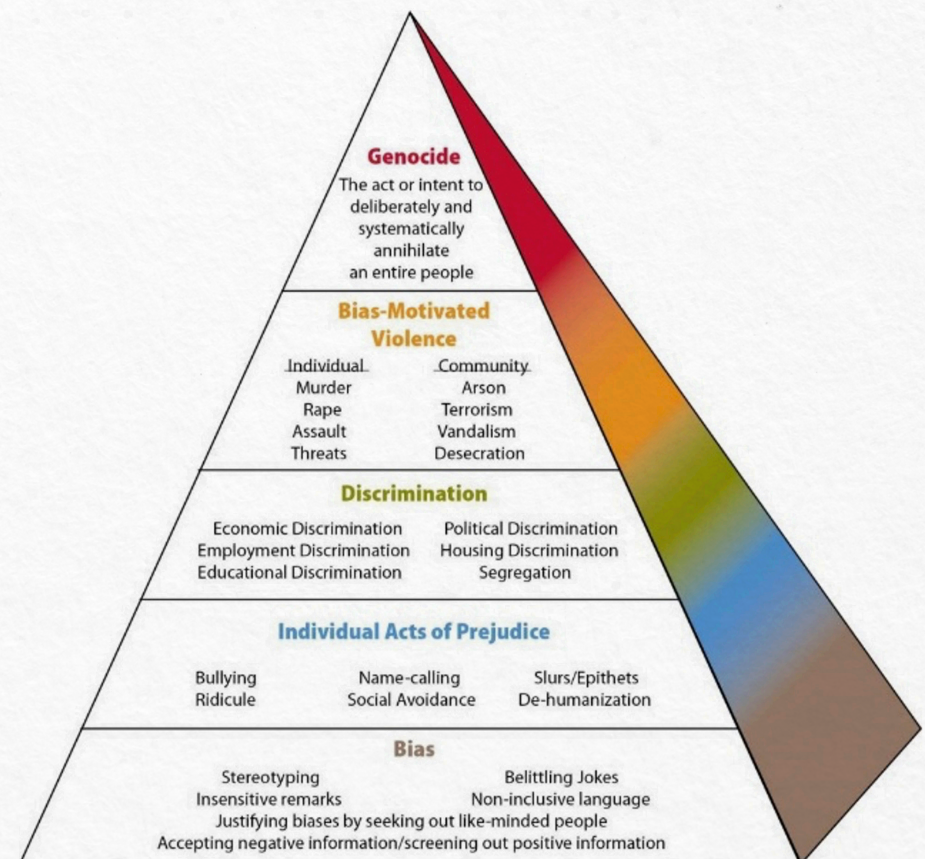
- › delivering diversity education and training to a variety of target groups in the area of bias, discrimination, hate speech and hate crime
- › Advocating in the EU against antisemitism and discrimination of all kinds

- › Facilitate Jewish participation and enhance the Jewish contribution to inclusive societies in Europe

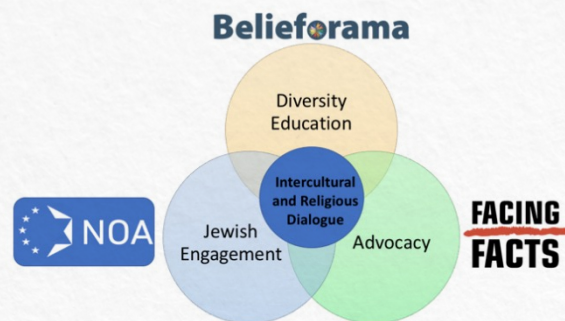
Promoting and fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue is a cross cutting mission that is built into our daily work.

In our work we use an integrated approach of **education/training research** and **advocacy** to tackle the different levels of what we call the pyramid of hate.

A model developed by the American psychologist Gordon Allport and adapted by the ADL which shows the building blocks of hate and how they are interconnected. At the basis of the pyramid we find acts of bias such as jokes, insensitive remarks. As we progress, hate manifestations become more serious, becoming acts of discrimination and then bias motivated violence such as hate crime. At the pinnacle of the pyramid we find the most tremendous expression of hate, genocide. As in a real pyramid we can see that the higher levels build on the lower levels. And when the lower levels remain unchecked, there is a risk of escalation which can get totally uncontrolled in the highest part of the pyramid as we sadly learned during the Shoah.







At CEJI we tackle the lower level of the pyramid with **our anti-bias/anti-discrimination training programmes**. With our stellar programme on religious diversity **Belieforama**, we have trained thousands of adults and educators in Europe. Our pedagogical approach, as developed and refined with the Belieforama programmes, is applied to all other activities of CEJI. With our programme **Facing Facts** we aim to generate effective responses to the problem of hate crime and hate speech, tackling the higher part of the pyramid. And finally, with our most recent programme **NOA (Networks Overcoming Antisemitism)** we adopt a holistic approach to combat antisemitism by developing tools aiming to tackle all the levels of the pyramid, from biases to hate crimes.

Our activities are integrated and there are several areas of overlap that reinforce each other. At the centre we can image intercultural and religious dialogue as cross cutting element in our work. Our expertise in combating bias and prejudices builds on a pedagogical approach which creates the conditions for effective and constructive intercultural and religious dialogue. And this pedagogical approach is applied to all aspects of our work.

The ability to facilitate dialogue and transform conflicts into constructive exchange is key for the success of our work.

Facing Facts is CEJI's programme aiming to tackle the issue of hate crime and hate speech in Europe. Started as Jewish and LGBT partnership, over the year with this programme we have managed to enlarge our partnership also to Roma, disability and antiracist organisations. The Facing Facts programme has always had a parallel mission of fostering solidarity and cooperation among different communities. This picture was taken in 2012 during the first TTT on monitoring hate crimes held in London. **This first TTT saw participation of Jewish LGBT, Muslim, Roma, anti-racism organisations who came together for the first time and sat in the same room for 5 days to learn how to recognize and monitor hate crimes.** Our expertise in facilitation and anti-bias training teachings were fundamental to facilitate that training. As Hanna mentioned earlier. Sometimes a community can come with certain prejudices about other communities. **For instance thinking of/or referring to Jewish communities as 'privileged minorities'.** An anti-bias element built into this process is essential to overcome these biases and set the conditions for a constructive dialogue which is essential to build effective coalitions to combat antisemitism and all forms of discrimination. This is also an important requirement to consolidate sustainable relationship over the years,

With the NOA project we are upscaling our experience of embedding inter-cultural and religious dialogue into a programme that offers a pioneering approach to tackle the problem of antisemitism in Europe,

NOA has a unique partnership of major Jewish networks, including Bnai B'rith Europe, AEPJ, EUJS, WJC and the EUPJ. This offers CEJI, as coordinator of the initiative, the opportunity to promote intercultural dialogue also within the partnership and more in general among Jewish communities and organisations.

The project combines an element of research with a series of initiatives which aim to raise awareness about Jews, Judaism and other existing initiatives to combat antisemitism.

NOA aims to evaluate MS policies in 10 key areas from education to culture and security as indicated by the EU Council declaration in order to support MS to develop holistic national actions plans to address and prevent antisemitism. We are assessing member states policies also in the area of culture and interreligious dialogue. With the help of relevant national stakeholders, in order to assess each country situation in these specific areas, we are trying to answer questions such as.

*Are inter-community partnerships promoted for the purpose of addressing care for the most vulnerable and the fight against discrimination?*

*Are there ongoing or regular opportunities for Jewish and other religious communities to meet and collaborate on joint projects?*

*Is Jewish cultural heritage being utilized to promote intercultural/interfaith dialogue involving Jewish communities and institutions, and to encourage in particular the exchange between children and young people of different faiths and backgrounds?*

We work against a list of indicators that can be very helpful to identify gaps in terms of national legislation and policies in these areas but most of all they are helpful to identify opportunities. NOA preliminary research shows that there is very little done by governments in the field of interreligious/intercultural dialogue. This is an area that can be really strengthened to raise the problem. Governments have the opportunity to provide the framework to bring communities together as opposed to leave communities isolated and marginalized.

NOA is also mapping existing efforts and initiatives to overcome antisemitism across Europe which include of course also initiatives promoting Jewish cultures and values. As Hanna previously said, one of the strategies we can implement to mitigate antisemitic bias is raising awareness about Jews and Judaism. Finally NOA profiles. The project will feature regular social media campaigns that focus on present Jewish contributions to Europe, representing contemporary role models, initiatives and stories that reinforce a positive narrative of European Jewry. By highlighting these stories, the project aims to bridge the gap of knowledge on Judaism, Jewish life and communities.



## WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT "ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES" 18 MAY 2021

**INTERVENTION BY REV. PROF. EMMANUEL AGIUS, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF MORAL THEOLOGY FACULTY OF THEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF MALTA AND MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN GROUP OF ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES (EGE) ON ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES, MALTA**



It is my pleasure and honour to participate in this webinar on 'Ethics in Science and New Technologies' organised by the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue. In my presentation I intend to share with you some reflections on my experience since 2005 as a member of the European Group of Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE) in order to highlight what this high-level interdisciplinary group of independent experts stands for. More specifically, I would like to focus on the dynamic and evolving scope of the ethical concerns in science, new technologies and innovation on the European landscape and on the future role of ethics in European and global governance.

Scientific progress and technological innovation have a major impact on society at large and the public opinion. So, upholding the neutrality of science and technology would not be amoral, but immoral. Technologies require the recognition that they embody values. In fact, technologies have a clear moral dimension - that is to say, a fundamental aspect that relates to values, ethics and norms. Certainly, technologies reflect the interests, behaviours and desires of their creators, and shape how the people using them can realise their potential, identities, relationships and goals.

Ethics and values are therefore at the heart of the transformation of culture through cutting-edge technology. It would be a gross mistake to perceive values and ethics as an obstacle to innovation and change. On the contrary, they are the kernel of innovation and change! They represent the moral compass indicating the way-forward for technology and innovation and at the same time the moral standards for the safeguarding of the good life. Values are the key reference point for calibrating the collective moral conscientiousness in its search for right actions and choices. This means that ethics is a source of motivation for moral commitment to decide which actions are permissible, justifiable and in the best interest of individuals or society - given that many decisions involve conflicting values, goals and desires.

Today's scientific and technological culture challenges our moral value system, our way of life and our basic life philosophy. It is precisely for this reason that it demands a critical mind, free of prejudice and open to new ways of thinking. The ethics of science and technology is not a personal problem but a collective problem and a societal issue that involves all citizens. Consequently, European citizens have to become more and more conscious and conscientious of the ethical implications of today's scientific and technological development to ensure a life of dignity and to empower themselves to safeguard the fundamental values and human rights embedded in our civilization. Science and technology policies will best succeed if built on strong ethical foundations. Rethinking technological development requires taking a human-centred approach which recognises the tension between seeking efficiencies and realising ethical values. Moreover, a human-centred approach to technologies is needed not to lose sight of one central question: How can technologies improve the quality of present life and at the same time enable a meaningful future for humankind?

Certainly, we cannot remain indifferent to the numerous ethical implications emerging from today's drastic change of our freedom of expression, privacy and autonomy resulting from information, security and surveillance technologies; the nature and role of work brought about by today's autonomous systems, robotics, digital technologies and artificial intelligence; the new patterns in our healthcare system instigated by robotic technologies, new and cheap vaccines produced by synthetic biology and gene editing; the high levels of life-expectancy and quality-of-life itself triggered off by life-sustaining and enhancement technologies; our nutritional lifestyle resulting from novel technologies in agriculture and the cloning of animals for food production; and our mobility system facilitated by new methods of autonomous driving. Ultimately, the intense public debate sparked by these new technologies inevitably requires deep moral reflections and sound ethical direction.

New technologies hold the promise of the future, from climate action and better health to more democratic and inclusive societies. However, the societal concern on the long-term, large-scale or integrated problems of innovation in science and new technologies have to be addressed not only by scientists alone but also by the active participation of civil society. The public mistrust of science and the fear of technology need to be addressed by creating and fostering effective structures of public debate. How people think about technologies matters. This is not simply because technologies are the primary contributor to economic growth worldwide. It's because technologies shape people, and people shape technologies. Certainly, the onus is on the scientists to become more sensitive to the ethical implications of their research and its application in order to inform the general public about the potential benefits and risks of the new technologies and to empower people from all strata of society to participate in debates on how to use their knowledge wisely and in the best public interest.

The debate surrounding the human embryonic sources for stem cell research, human genome editing and the patenting of genes retrieved from human embryos are challenging our views on the very nature of humanity itself. While these thorny issues are raising pertinent questions about the very meaning of the humanum, the ethical implications of the genome editing of plants, animals and gene drives rather raise crucial questions on how to deal with the environment. The pace of change seems to be accelerating, and concepts which were taken for granted for many centuries are challenged as science and technology provide new and exciting perspectives on our lifestyle and culture in general. The EU is committed to steer responsibly and cautiously the technology and innovation policies in the twenty-first century since they are raising fundamental issues concerning human dignity, human and planetary wellbeing, autonomy, solidarity, social and global justice and equity, safety, privacy and sustainability. On the one hand, Europe cannot afford to forgo the benefits of innovation. However, on the other hand, it cannot ignore its culture and civilization rooted in ethical values!

### The institutionalisation of ethics

Within the European governance of emerging technologies, particularly in biotechnological matters, ethics has taken a leading role which is unparalleled to the rest of the world. In fact, a bureaucratic apparatus has been set up to support and formally include ethical reflection into EU institutions, giving rise to the phenomenon of the progressive 'institutionalization of ethics', namely, the integration of critical ethical reflection into public institutions. An organ with ethical competence was set up to steer the innovation process among member states. This body, which aimed to foster public confidence, took the name, first, of a Group of Advisers on the Ethical Implications of Biotechnology (GAIEB) and, then, of a European Group of Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Plomer, A. 'The European Group on Ethics: Law, Politics, and the Limits of Moral Integration in Europe', *European Law Journal* 14(6) November 2008: 839-859.



The range of topics addressed in the EGE's opinions is exciting, challenging and daunting. Moreover, they reflect the EU's evolving concerns on the impact of the scientific progress and technological innovation on the citizens' life and their future. Furthermore, they reveal that the ethical standpoint adopted by the interdisciplinary Group is thoroughly European because the ethical values and rights enshrined in the EU Treaties and Charters are the Group's moral horizon for balancing technology and innovation with ethics.

The vast range of scientific and technological areas covered in the EGE's opinions are highlighted in this paper precisely to map the EU's political vision and commitment to create an innovative Europe in accordance with the Lisbon strategy. It was this policy which ultimately paved the way for the setting up of institutional ethical bodies to review and monitor the impact of technological progress and innovation. The EU's market-led vision never meant the abandonment of what is distinctive about European values, but rather a reinforced and genuine attempt to integrate progress and innovation within a sound and holistic ethical framework.

Ethics as an institutionalized phenomenon started on the European landscape within the field of biotechnology and in connection with biotechnological innovation. The strong need for ethical advice regarding the regulatory framework in biotechnology motivated the European Commission (EC) to integrate ethics in its institutional setting. This was a significant step forward in bolstering the acceptance of emerging biotechnologies in the EU. In November of 1991, with the establishment of the GAEIB, the institutionalisation of ethics was incorporated in the decision-making process - originally in relation to biotechnology, and later for all areas of application of technology and innovation.<sup>23</sup>

In setting up this advisory body the EC has highlighted its determination to integrate Europe's science and technology in a manner that serves the interests of European society and respects the fundamental rights of every European citizen. Moreover, the incorporation of ethics in science and technology policy, practices and impact is an important landmark in the narrative of the European Union as a community of values. EU's attempts to formally design ethics as a form of normativity different from the legislative and the regulatory ones has introduced in its structures a sort of "advisory normativity"<sup>24</sup>.

After the GAEIB's mandate had expired on 31 July 1997<sup>25</sup> and the legislative process leading to 'Directive Biotech' was in full operation<sup>26</sup>, the EC on 16 December 1997 decided to replace it by the EGE, "extending the Group's mandate to cover all areas of the application of science and technology".<sup>27</sup> The EGE was then established in December 1997<sup>28</sup> and its mandate was renewed in 2001, 2005, 2011, 2016 and 2021. The EGE, which directly reported to the EC President, was given the broader mandate "to cover all areas of the

23 Commission Decision on the renewal of the mandate of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies, 11 May 2005, (2005/383/EC).

24 Mariachiara Tallacchini, "Governing by Values. EU Ethics: Soft Tool, Hard Effects", *Minerva* (2009) 47 (3):287-289 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225556851\\_Governing\\_by\\_Values\\_EU\\_Ethics\\_Soft\\_Tool\\_Hard\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225556851_Governing_by_Values_EU_Ethics_Soft_Tool_Hard_Effects))

25 EP resolution of 13 June 1997 on the mandate of the Group of Advisers on the Ethical Implications of Biotechnology to the EC (B4-0484/97), OJ 1997 C 200/258 [EP resolution GAEIB], recital A.

26 On 29 August 1997, the EC had adopted an amended proposal: COM(97)446 final 29.08.1997

27 EC decision (EU) 2016/835 of 25 May 2016 on the renewal of the mandate of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies, OJ 2016 L 140/21 [EGE mandate V 2016], recital 3. This current mandate started on 28.5.2016 and lasts until 27.5.2019.

28 EC communication de M. le PRÉSIDENT, en accord avec M. BANGEMANN, M. FLYNN, Mme CRESSON, Mme BJERREGAARD, M. MONTI, M. FISCHLER et Mme BONINO: Création d'un groupe Européen d'éthique des sciences et des nouvelles technologies, SEC(97)2404 final 12.12.1997 [EGE mandate I 1997].

application of science and technology"<sup>29</sup>, but its role - to provide the Commission with high quality and independent advice on ethical aspects of science and new technologies in connection with the preparation and implementation of Community legislation or policies - increasingly made it an expert committee.

The EGE provides the Commission with high quality, independent advice on all aspects of EU legislation and policies, where ethical, societal and fundamental rights issues intersect with the development of science and new technologies. The EGE's role is to prepare opinions with authoritative normative statements to influence the legislation and administrative activity that supports the activities of market actors within the biotechnology industry.<sup>30</sup> According to its renewed 2016 mandate, the EGE is primarily concerned with all ethical questions with "wider societal implications" originating from science and new technologies.<sup>31</sup> According to this mandate, the EGE's task is to "advise the Commission on ethical questions relating to sciences and new technologies, either at the request of the Commission or on its own initiative".<sup>32</sup> The EGE aims at promoting ethical EU policymaking with due regard to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR), the Treaties and in particular the values enshrined in Art. 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU).<sup>33</sup> In other words, the group perceives "the values laid down in the Treaties" as the "normative pillars", whereon the ethical framework for European policies is built.<sup>34</sup> Apart from that, the EGE is a standard-setter of ethical norms and values globally.

The members of the EGE are appointed by the EC President, based on a proposal from the Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation. The EGE, which "shall be independent, pluralist and multidisciplinary", is composed of 15 members serving in personal capacity, and demonstrating "a high level of expertise and pluralism"; furthermore, the mandate strives to establish a geographical balance, as well as a balanced representation of relevant know-how and areas of interest".<sup>35</sup> Today, besides a balance of qualities, gender and geographical distribution, the current mandate requires "independent advice of the highest quality", "combining wisdom and foresight", as well as "internationally recognised experts, with a track record of excellence and experience at the European and global level".<sup>36</sup>

29 European Commission, Commission decision on the renewal of the mandate of the European group on ethics in science and new technologies. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities 2005/383/EC. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005D0383:EN:HTML>)

30 Helen Busby, Tamara Hervey and Alison Mohr, "Ethical EU law? The influence of the European Group of Ethics in Science and New Technologies," *European Law Review* 33 (6) 2008: 803-842.

31 EC (2016a) Decision 2016/835 on the renewal of the mandate of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies. OJ 2016 L 140/21. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016D0835&from=EN>)

32 Art. 2 and Art. 3, para. 2 Commission Decision 2010/1/EU on the Renewal of the Mandate of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies, O.J. 2010, L 1/8

33 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016ME/TXT&from=EN>

34 EGE, General Activity Report (2011-2016), Brussels, EC, 2018: 13

35 EGE mandate V 2016, Art 4(1), (2) and (4).

36 EGE mandate V 2016, Art 4(6)(a) and (b)



The EGE develops its opinions and standpoints in a collaborative way, seeking consensus amongst its members, while leaving open the possibility of dissenting opinions,<sup>37</sup> whereas the discussions are confidential.<sup>38</sup> EGE's opinions on science and technologies do not merely take a European perspective but endorse a global approach. The EU turns to the EGE when it faces challenges with policies on governance in the domain of science and technology. So far, the EGE has delivered (legally non-binding) thirty-two opinions, as well as a number of statements and reports. Several of these opinions have been taken into consideration in the EU's legislative process. In fact, the EGE opinions have been quoted in several EU legal documents.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, they endorse an overview of the state of the art of sciences and technologies concerned, a thorough analysis of the ethical issues at stake, and a set of recommendations.<sup>40</sup>

### Evolving European landscape of ethical concerns

An important and conspicuous observation drawn from the opinions published by the EGE since 2005 - the year when I have been appointed member of this interdisciplinary group - is the changing and evolving landscape of the ethical concerns in science, technology and innovation across the European landscape. Over a span of sixteen years it is noteworthy to observe that the EC's requests to the EGE to prepare opinions on scientific and technological innovation have evolved from the domain of biotechnology to other areas far beyond the field of medicine and life sciences which in actual fact were the basis of the EGE's reports during its first two decades. Since 2005 one observes a remarkable shift to the digital, communication, AI and robotic technologies. Evidently, science and technology, which are characterised by innovation, are not static phenomena. Over the past few decades, on the global level, research, innovation and technology have moved towards information and communication technologies, self-learning machines, AI and quantum computer science.

The European Union, as a leading global economic player, is committed to invest in innovation and research which are the cornerstone of its strategy for economic growth and development. To sustain a robust policy on innovation and technology, the EC has requested the EGE to draft opinions on how to address the significant ethical challenges emerging from these converging technologies. The crux of the matter is how these challenges can be met in accordance with the set of values and rights endorsed in the European Charter and the Treaty of the European Union. It is not only science and technology that are moving forward but also the landscape of values within the European population. This is a very important point which cannot be

37 EGE mandate V 2016, Art 5(6) and (8), "as a 'minority opinion'". See for instance the dissenting opinion of Günter Virt on the controversial issue of patenting of human embryonic stem cells, in EGE opinion No 16 (European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (2002, p. 19)).

38 EGE mandate V 2016, Art 5(10). These internal EGE documents cannot be accessed, "even from within the Commission"; Mohr et al. (2012, p. 109). Mohr, A., Busby, H., Hervey, T. K., & Dingwall, R. (2012). Mapping the role of official bioethics advice in the governance of biotechnologies in the EU: The European Group on Ethics' opinion on commercial cord blood banking. *Science and Public Policy*, 39, 2012: 109

39 Directive Biotech, recital 19 (GAEIB); EC recommendation on nanoscience, recital 6; Regulation advanced therapy, recital 28; Directive tissues and cells, recital 33.

40 EGE mandate V 2016, Art 5(5).

discussed solely from the viewpoint of technological innovation, the Charter<sup>41</sup> or the Treaties<sup>42</sup> as if the latter were static documents which cannot be interpreted hermeneutically and applied creatively to address the new challenges and opportunities of today's emerging technologies. The ethical landscape is not static. Problems emerging from science and technology are not solved once and for all. This is due to the rapid progress in science and technology, to the changing values in the population, and to new developments in ethical theories. The EGE has earnestly taken cognizance of the plurality of values and the diversity of opinions among European citizens and institutions. Really and truly, social inclusion and cohesion cannot be achieved in the EU without the prudential balancing of values and rights enshrined in the Charter and the Treaties against the respect for the pluralism and the diversity of cultural, philosophical and religious traditions.

### A European approach

In its opinions, the EGE grounds its ethical approach on European values and fundamental rights, especially the "corner stone" of human dignity which is at the roots of the ethics of science and new technologies as well as of human rights. While the term "European values" is often used in political statements, it is important to note that those values are underpinned by the principle of rule of law and fundamental rights enshrined by EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. These values are built upon binding and enforceable rights. The EU's approach to ethics can best be described by its motto "United in diversity". Europe is the expression of unity in diverse traditions and cultures. On the one hand, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) draws inspiration "from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe"<sup>43</sup> and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR)<sup>44</sup> which refers to the Union's "common values"<sup>45</sup> and "spiritual and moral heritage"<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, the CFR requires the EU to respect "the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States".<sup>47</sup>

Generally speaking, ethics is that branch of philosophy which searches for the meaning of the 'good life'. Yet, it would be a mistake not to recognise the particular cultural articulation of ethics. The fundamental ethos of applied ethics, its methodology and language, its concerns and emphases, and its very institu-

41 The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR) enshrines certain political, social, and economic rights for European Union (EU) citizens and residents into EU law. It was drafted by the European Convention and solemnly proclaimed on 7 December 2000 by the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission. However, its then legal status was uncertain and it did not have full legal effect until the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009.

42 The Treaties of the European Union are a set of international treaties between the European Union (EU) member states which sets out the EU's constitutional basis. Two core functional treaties, the Treaty on European Union (originally signed in Maastricht in 1992, aka The Maastricht Treaty) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (originally signed in Rome in 1957 as the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, aka The Treaty of Rome), lay out how the EU operates, and there are a number of satellite treaties which are interconnected with them. The treaties have been repeatedly amended by other treaties over the 65 years since they were first signed.

43 2nd recital TEU.

44 Consolidated Version of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, O.J. 2012, C 326/391.

45 1st recital CFR

46 2nd recital CFR.

47 3rd recital CFR. See also 6th recital, Art. 3, para. 3 subpara. 4 and Art. 4, para. 2 TEU. In the context of stem cell research, the Commission has concluded from this provision that "each Member State retains its full prerogative to legislate on ethical matters"; European Commission, Report on Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research, SEC (2003) 441 final 3.4.2003, 12.



tionalisation have been shaped by beliefs, values, and modes of thinking grounded in specific social and cultural traditions.<sup>48</sup> It is only recently that we have become aware of the importance of examining critically the socio-cultural context in order to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of dominant concepts of applied ethics. Charles Taylor raises a similar issue in his *Sources of the Self*, in which morality and identity are considered two sides of the same coin. To know who we are is to know to which moral sources we belong. The community, the particular group to which we belong, is usually at the center of our moral experience. Even the use of ethical language depends on a shared form of life. Wittgenstein's notion that our understanding of language is a matter of picking up practices and being inducted into a particular form of life is relevant here.

These philosophical insights are important to comprehend the European approach adopted by the EGE in its reports. The concept of Europe refers to an area with a relative unity because of similar ways of life and thinking. Europe is not merely a distinct geographical entity, but rather a political and cultural concept. Although in Europe there are a number of traditions which together constitute a coherent culture, a specific sphere with a particular set of values which constitute its ethical brand can be identified. The European cultural sphere has been strongly influenced by the development of Christianity, and now by the presence of other religions, particularly Islam and Judaism. It was shaped by political changes, such as the French Revolution and the First and Second World Wars, by philosophical ideas about humanism and Enlightenment, and by scientific and technological progress. The EU's fundamental values are respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. These values unite all the member states – no country that does not recognise these values can belong to the Union. They are understood as universal basic values that are shared by all member states and are therefore common and uniting. They are intended to promote inner-European cohesion and the European way of life.

Article 2 of the Treaty of the EU states that “the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights, including the rights of the persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society where pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”. Article 3 further specifies that the “Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the wellbeing of its people” and, among others, “it shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”. Furthermore, the EU is committed to promote “social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child” and “economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States.”

One may conclude that the ‘European approach’ to biotechnology and technology in general is distinct from the ‘American approach’ which is structured primarily on a principle-based ethics. The Georgetown mantra, namely the classical principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice, has dominated the American ethical perspective in the domain of science and technology. A notable issue in ‘principlism’ is the lack of self-evidence in the interpretation of highly generalized principles to a certain practice with all its particularities and complexities. It does not mean that the EGE never referred to these basic principles dating back to the Hippocratic Oath. However, according to the Group, the principle-based ethics is limited because it does not give due importance to values such as human dignity, solidarity, proportionality and the common good. The rights perspective and values approach enshrined in the Charter and the Treaties are broader and more comprehensive than procedural ethics and accordingly offer a com-

48 Ten Have, H., & Gordijn B., eds, *Bioethics in a European Perspective*. Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2003: 59.

munity-based approach to science and new technologies. Unlike ‘principlism’ which rejects a hierarchical ordering of principles, the European approach is centred on the fundamental value of the human dignity of every human person. This overarching value serves as the foundation of the norm of morality and therefore underpins all ethical principles.

### Scientific integrity

In its statement on the formulation of a code of conduct for research integrity in projects funded by the EC, the EGE promotes the highest standards of good scientific practice in all research that is funded through its own programmes.<sup>49</sup> Scientific integrity is crucial in research as it endorses four basic principles for the ethical guidance of technology. One cannot talk about science, technology, governance and policies without taking into account the issues of reliability, honesty, respect and accountability. It is here pertinent to ask what is meant by these principles. Reliability means that a policy on science and technology should seriously take into account the quality of research data. Moreover, one must adopt a critical reflection on the design, methodology and analysis of technology.

Honesty means that research and discussions on science and technology have to be transparent, open and consistent. Publication of results has to be open and accurate, avoiding over-interpretation of results. Usually, scientists publish their good results to be praised for their innovation. However, they hardly publish the negative results for their research in science and technology. Honesty requires that not only positive results but also the negative ones are to be published. This approach is cost-effective and time-saving by informing other researchers not to repeat the same mistakes.

The responsible conduct of research includes the proper management and retention of the research data. Researchers must follow codes of conduct which contain proper research procedures, such as rules for proper design and execution of projects, ways of proper management of resources, and avoidance of any misconduct, such as the manipulation or fabrication of data or plagiarism.

### Shifting ethical concerns from biotechnology to digital technologies

One may observe a sharp contrast between the biotechnological issues covered in the EGE's opinions prior to 2005 and those which the EC requested the Group to look at after 2006. From 1991 to 2005, the GAEIB, and later on the EGE, dealt with the thorny ethical issues related to products derived from human blood or human plasma, gene therapy, prenatal diagnosis, patenting inventions involving elements of human origin, labelling of food, genetic modification of animals, cloning techniques, human tissue banking, umbilical cord blood, healthcare in the information society, human stem cell research and use, clinical research in developing countries, genetic testing in the workplace, and ICT implants in the human body. Moreover, opinions on the ethical guidance related to the Research Framework Programmes - the fifth, sixth and seventh Framework Programmes – were also sought by the EC from the Group.

Since 2006, the ethical concerns of the EC in the domain of technology and innovation took a significant turn. The following list of ethical problems addressed lately by the EGE at the request of the EC confirms this

49 EGE, “Statement on the formulation of a code of conduct for research integrity for projects funded by the European Commission”, ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/ege/research\\_integrity\\_ege\\_statement.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/ege/research_integrity_ege_statement.pdf))



conspicuous shift in EU's ethical, political and societal concerns: nanotechnology; modern developments in agricultural technologies; synthetic biology; information and communication technologies; assessment of research, production and use of energy; security and surveillance technologies; new health technologies and citizen participation; the future of work; and genome editing. This gamut of issues, which goes way beyond that which had formed the basis for the EGE's reports prior to 2005, reflects the EU's commitment to appraise critically new emerging technologies and their moral role in society.

It is worth noting that EC requested the EGE to work on these reports concerning complex technological issues in order to empower EU institutions and citizens alike to make informed decisions about the development and application of powerful new technologies, particularly those that blur the lines between human and technological capabilities, such as machine learning, biotechnologies, neurotechnologies, and virtual and augmented reality. The EGE's reports since 2006 mirror the EC's vision and mission for a more balanced and empowering perspective which recognises technologies as capable of interpreting, transforming and giving meaning in the world around us. Rather than being simple objects or processes that are distinct from human beings, frontier technologies are deeply socially constructed, culturally oriented and reflective of societal values. They reflect how we engage with the world around us. Since frontier technologies affect the way people order their lives, interact with one another and perceive themselves, the EC has sought the EGE's advice on how to strike the right balance between embedding ethical values in emerging technologies and fostering innovation.

As the EU relies on science, technology and innovation to secure its present and develop its future, reflecting on and anticipating societal impacts arising from current narratives of technology embodied in EU policy is essential in ensuring trust among its citizens. The EGE's reports on communication, digital, AI and robotic technologies confirm the EU's commitment to consolidate the space for dialogue, critical scrutiny and reflection of knowledge that supports research and innovation. Moreover, at the same time they deepen the interface between science, society and ethics in accordance with its approach based on the principle of responsible research and innovation that anticipates and assesses potential implications and societal expectations. Frontier technologies related to big data, internet of things, artificial intelligence, information and communication technologies, nanotechnologies, renewable energy technologies, and robotic technologies at the workplace and healthcare settings, which were the focus of the EGE's reports since 2006, challenge the European commitment to integration unless they are incorporated within a robust European ethical framework. The EGE embarked on a critical appraisal of the challenges and opportunities emerging from the convergence of today's profoundly transformative technologies to assist the EC in its political commitment to steer the European society towards a competitive, just, sustainable and inclusive knowledge-based economy that respects the ethical values enshrined in EU Treaties and Charters.

In the following paragraphs I would like to highlight some of the salient ethical issues addressed in a number of EGE's opinions on convergence technologies which go beyond biotechnology. In its opinion on the ethics of modern developments in agricultural technologies finalised by the EGE in December 2008<sup>50</sup>, the Group stressed the need for an integrated approach on agriculture technologies so that the production, storage and distribution processes are considered together when the implications of any new technology is assessed ethically. Moreover, the Group considers the goals of (1) food security, (2) food safety and (3) sustainability as first priorities and guiding principles to which any technology in agriculture must adhere.

50 European Commission, Ethics of modern developments in agricultural technologies, Opinion 24, Luxembourg 2008 (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9369a035-5a5e-45da-8e37-09717ed806d5/language-en/format-PDF/source-77404379>)

Furthermore, the EGE calls for the explicit embedding of ethical principles in agriculture policy (whether traditional or innovative) by arguing that respect for human dignity and justice, two fundamental ethical principles, have to apply to production and distribution of food products. Using this ethical framework as a point of departure, the EGE in this opinion makes recommendations on a plethora of issues, such as the revision of EU Common Agriculture Policy; technology impact assessment of agricultural technologies; the right to food; sustainability of agriculture technologies; food safety; agricultural biodiversity; soil and water protection; biofuels; GM crops; research in agricultural sciences; policy-making in arable agriculture; global trade in agricultural products; fair competition and food prices; and food waste.

In May 2010 the Commission adopted the Digital Agenda for Europe, aiming to promote innovative uses of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) while respecting citizens' rights and EU fundamental values. This was one of the seven flagship initiatives foreseen in the Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth. In order to promote a responsible, socially inclusive and ethically sound implementation of this strategy, the former President of the European Commission, J. M. Barroso, had requested the EGE to write an opinion on the ethical implications of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The EGE's opinion<sup>51</sup>, published in February 2012, addresses governance aspects (ethical, legal, social and political aspects) related to the following sectors of the EU Digital Agenda: social networks; E-Government; E-Commerce; corporate social responsibility; digital divide; ESkills; E-Advertising; cybercrime; net neutrality; internet of things; E-Health; EU Regulatory Frameworks for Personal Data Protection; data mining and data profiling; protection of vulnerable groups; political participation; and environmental impact and use of raw materials. The EGE recognises the potential of the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) for the European Union, and stresses the need to promote a responsible, inclusive and socially sustainable implementation of this important policy sector. Moreover, the Group advocates the need to promote DAE actions in accordance with the EU's fundamental values.

Opinion 27 on the ethical framework for assessing research, production and use of energy<sup>52</sup>, which was concluded in January 2013, has contributed immensely to the debate on a sustainable energy mix in Europe by studying the ethical impact of research on different energy sources on human well-being. The EGE has adopted an integrated ethics approach to achieve an equilibrium between four criteria - access rights, security of supply, safety, and sustainability - in the light of social, environmental and economic concerns. The EGE recommended that the EU should secure and promote the right of access to sufficient energy services to European citizens and this right to be included in the next revision of the Treaty or the Charter of Fundamental Rights. In another recommendation the EGE pointed out that all data regarding any kind of elements that affect risk in the production and transport of energy, health and environmental consequences of its use, and the total costs of any kind of energy production, should be available in a well-informed and transparent way so that society informs itself in order to take decisions. Moreover, the EGE recommended that the EU should develop a European energy smart grid to secure and optimize energy supply by consolidating cooperation among European Union Member States in the spirit of solidarity. Furthermore, the group recommended that the EU should favour the development and use of low carbon technologies with special attention to renewables, such as through fiscal and other relevant measures.

51 European Commission, Ethics of Information and Communication Technology, Opinion 26, Luxembourg, 2012 (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c35a8ab5-a21d-41ff-b654-8cd6d41f6794/language-en/format-PDF/source-77404276>)

52 European Commission, Ethical framework for assessing research, production and use of energy, Opinion 27, Luxembourg, 2013 (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4447f1fa-eb0c-44e7-9a75-45377d5abd73/language-en/format-PDF/source-77404264>)



With opinion 28 on the ethics of security and surveillance technologies<sup>53</sup>, which was concluded in May 2015, the EGE intended to provide a reference point for the EC regarding the ethics of security and surveillance measures in an era where rapid advances in telecommunications and computing have enabled the data of billions of citizens around the globe to be tracked and scrutinized on an unprecedented scale. The opinion raised the pertinent question concerning the seemingly conflicting notions of security and freedom. Do we need both? And can we enjoy both without the pursuit of one jeopardising the other? These are two central questions addressed by the Opinion which challenges the notion that ‘security’ and ‘freedom’ can be traded against one another. While a balance must be struck between competing values when they come into conflict, certain core principles, such as human dignity, cannot be bartered with. The Opinion calls for a more nuanced approach, in which the proportionality and effectiveness of security and surveillance technologies are subject to rigorous assessment, and in which rights are prioritized rather than traded. At its core, the Opinion contends that an ethical foundation for the use of security and surveillance technologies requires a broader understanding of the security concept, encompassing the human and societal dimensions of security. Security is not simply protection from physical harm, but a means to enable individual and collective flourishing.

Today’s Fourth Industrial Revolution is ushering in a paradigm shift in employment patterns. Developments in artificial intelligence, robotics, automation, computerised algorithms, digital technology and emerging technologies are shaping the future of work. EGE’s Opinion on Future of Work, Future of Society<sup>54</sup>, which was published in December 2019, has addressed these thorny issues. In its 2018 statement on Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Autonomous Systems<sup>55</sup>, the EGE discussed the complex moral issues emerging from the advances in AI, robotics and so-called ‘autonomous’ technologies. This statement calls for the launch of a process that would pave the way towards a common, internationally recognised ethical and legal framework for the design, production, use and governance of artificial intelligence, robotics, and ‘autonomous’ systems. The statement also proposes a set of fundamental ethical principles, based on the values laid down in the EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights that can guide its development.

In Opinion 30 the EGE concluded that digital technologies create value and bring efficiency gains. However, evidence indicates a considerable accumulation of wealth by a small section of society while others face increasing hardship and a widening inequality gap. The opinion warns that new forms of work bring unparalleled flexibility but also precarity. The limitations of the existing social models to guarantee decent livelihood for many Europeans were also discussed. The EGE emphasised that technologies alone are not the root cause of current challenges, and points to the policies and institutions that shape working conditions. In order to safeguard the European values of human dignity, solidarity and justice, the EGE calls for a shift and a bold re-thinking of the existing social contract: rather than placing the overwhelming responsibility on individual upskilling, the EU should embark on societal upskilling. This would involve placing renewed consideration on the institutions and economic, political and social frameworks that shape the welfare of people and societies. Notably, in its recommendation the EGE calls upon the Commission and Member States to consider how social security benefits can be provided outside the formal employment

53 European Commission, Ethics of security and surveillance technologies, Opinion 28, Luxembourg, 2015 (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6f1b3ce0-2810-4926-b185-54fc3225c969/language-en/format-PDF/source-77404258>)

54 European Commission, The Future of Work, Future of Society, Opinion 30, Luxembourg, 2019 (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9ee4fad5-ee77-11e9-a32c-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-171499262>)

55 European Commission, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Autonomous Systems, Brussels, 2018 (file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/K10418224ENN.en.pdf)

schemes and calls upon Member States to implement fiscal policies that simultaneously foster growth and reduce income inequity, ensuring a fair distribution of the wealth created as a result of technology and automation.

The EGE’s 2016 statement on gene editing<sup>56</sup> was revisited and developed further in its Opinion on genome editing which was published in March 2021.<sup>57</sup> The advent of new genome editing technologies such as CRISPR/CasX has opened new dimensions of what and how genetic interventions into our world are possible. This Opinion addresses the profound ethical questions raised and revived by them. It analyses various domains of application, from human health to animal experimentation, from livestock breeding to crop variety and to gene drives. With its wide view across diverse areas, it identifies underlying and overarching issues that deserve our concerted attention, among them, the different meanings that ought to be attributed to humanness, naturalness or diversity. This enables conclusions that provide panoramic perspectives complementing narrower, area-specific analyses.

In the same vein, the Opinion is concerned with the global dimension of genome editing and its regulation, and formulates recommendations with a particular focus on the international level. Its main overarching considerations are the following: a) how the human ability to edit the genome should be regulated is closely linked to questions about the status of humanity in ‘nature’; b) the application of genome editing in human and non-human animals raises questions about what defines us as humans and what distinguishes species from each other; and c) diversity, human diversity and overall biodiversity, can be impacted by genome editing in different ways. The focus on the broader picture of this Opinion also raises awareness of the risk that genome editing could be hailed as a technological solution for issues of a social nature. The issue of ‘how safe is safe enough’ was also discussed in detail. Moreover, the Group insisted that the ‘safety concept’ must be framed in its broadest sense, including psychological, social and environmental dimensions, as well as questions about who gets to decide what is safe enough, and by which processes.

The overview of the EGE’s recent opinions outlined in the above paragraphs clearly demonstrates that the EU’s challenges in science, technology and innovation have shifted towards the new-generation digital technologies emerging as a result of the fourth industrial revolution. This paradigm shift in technology has a profound impact in EU’s economy and society, transforming products, processes and business models in every industry from construction, health and agri-food to the tourism and audio-visual sector. Europe has a tremendous opportunity to benefit from digital innovation. The EC realised that embracing these opportunities requires ethical reflections in order to steer this innovation towards a digital future within a coherent European approach. This approach inherently embraces values since the EU is fundamentally a community of values. The EGE, as a high-level group of interdisciplinary and independent experts, has had during the past few decades the unique privilege of keeping vigilant and at the same time of calibrating the European moral compass to charter innovation in science and technology along the surest, safest and most trustworthy ethical pathway.

56 European Commission, Statement on Gene Editing, Brussels, 2016 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/egen\\_editing\\_egen\\_statement.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/egen_editing_egen_statement.pdf))

57 European Commission, Ethics of Genome Editing, Luxembourg, 2021, Opinion 32 (file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/KI0121062ENN.en%20(1).pdf)



### The role of ethics for EU's future

Recent developments and events, such as Brexit, the rule of law situation in some EU member states and the covid-19 pandemic, have put the European project and democracy at risk. The EU is at a crossroad and must rise to the challenges that it is facing. Public debates in the EU reveal that the prevailing general feeling is that now time is ripe enough for the EU to make a change of direction and to reinvigorate its commitment to its founding principles in order to avoid an unprecedented political crisis. Thus, one may conclude that now is the moment to reflect deeper on the EU's vision and mission in order to strengthen the EU's institutions and empower EU citizens to shape together the future of Europe with clear objectives based on European values. The importance and relevance of the EGE's statement on Values for the Future: the Role of Ethics in European and Global Governance<sup>58</sup>, which was published by the EC in May 2021, should be evaluated within this general political context, namely today's European commitment to address its challenges and priorities. What kind of society do we want for Europe and what kind of normative order do we want for a world in which Europe plays its part? This is the central question raised by the statement.

The Conference on the Future of Europe, announced by the Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen in her inaugural address<sup>59</sup>, launched a landmark democratic process on how the EU should develop in the future. It is a collective soul-searching effort on the European landscape to evaluate whether the EU is rising to the challenges of current times and how to enhance those areas that need reform or strengthening. A key aspect of this initiative is to bring the public closer to the EU institutions, listen to people's concerns, involve them directly in the process of the Conference and provide an adequate and meaningful response.

The EGE's statement contributes immensely to the main objective of the said Conference which is citizen-focused and a bottom-up exercise for Europeans to have their say on what they expect from the EU. The central insight of the Statement is the democratisation of ethics, namely, the empowerment of European citizens to become active participants in the ethical debate. The Statement points to the importance of recognising that values cannot be set by those in power, whether political or economic, but are the outcome of dynamic debate and practice. It projects a socio-political context where citizens are at the centre of inclusive and participatory policy making, with innovative means for democratic participation and public engagement. Reflective, deliberative and participatory approaches can more effectively embed values and ethics in technological development.

Moreover, the Statement points out that there is no authoritative interpretation of values. Instead they are the outcome of dynamic debate and lived practice. Structures and mechanisms should be in place to ensure that the negotiation of values and collective goals is mediated through inclusive processes of democratic deliberation, with the participation of all in the collective making of the future that we would like to see unfold. Wide deliberation regarding what world we want to live together in and want to create for future generations is the key issue.

This inclusive approach to ethical deliberations in Europe on science, technology and innovation is becoming more and more urgent in view of today's increasing pressure on values and fundamental values. No

58 European Commission, Values for the Future: the Role of Ethics in European and Global Governance, Luxembourg, 2021 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/ege/ec\\_rtd\\_ege-values-for-the-future.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/ege/ec_rtd_ege-values-for-the-future.pdf))

59 Ursula van der Leyen, "State of the Union Address by President van Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary", [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_20\\_1655](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655)

one denies the fact that the European project is founded on fundamental rights, democracy, the rule of law, ethics and values. They provide legitimacy to the solutions and developments to the problems which Europe is facing with the emergence of the digital industrial revolution. The Statement emphasises how every human intervention in the world is shaped by values – whether consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, ethics cannot be disentangled from science, technology and innovation. Europe cannot ignore its ethical roots and become oblivious of its foundation on fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy – core pillars of the European project. No technology can promote the common good without endorsing a set of values.

Yet, at the same time, these values are at risk even if they are at the heart of the European project itself. As Ursula van Leyden, the President of the European Commission, has summarised and remarked in her programme: "Upholding a strong and viable democracy in Europe is a question of legitimacy and trust. Democracy is a core value of our Union, together with fundamental rights and the rule of law. However, European democracy faces multiple challenges both from outside and within. The application of science and technology without due diligence and adequate reflection in terms of our traditional European values – could be a threat to democracy, the dignity of European citizens, the value of life and to fundamental liberties."<sup>60</sup>

The Statement discusses also the state and future of ethics for public policy in Europe and the world, for a century that will see major complex challenges and many new scientific and technological breakthroughs with significant consequences for the lives and wellbeing of individual citizens and groups, and in some cases, with existential risks for humankind, eco-systems, and the planet. Scientific progress and technological innovation impact every aspect of our lives and ethics and values are at the heart of shaping our world through innovations. Europe will have to deal responsibly with changes in the twenty-first century which will raise fundamental issues regarding sustainability, human and planetary wellbeing, human dignity and autonomy, solidarity, social and global justice and equality, safety, privacy and individual responsibility. In doing so it cannot afford to forgo the benefits that innovation – in its broadest, social meaning – may bring for European citizens.

The statement outlines a number of characteristics which a promising ethics for the future of Europe must embrace. In a world of new technologies which is becoming more complex, dynamic and hyper-connected at many levels, the political mechanism and social institutions should be improved to help citizens to make judgements systematically, democratically, inclusively, transparently and sustainably. There is nothing that is not value-laden. However, values may be hidden, unarticulated, suppressed or taken for granted. Thus, we need to be vigilant and sensitive at overseeing all value-infused processes, make them transparent and make those involved accountable. We cannot remain neutral or avoid adopting an ethical position. We have to wake up from the dream of neutrality.

Europe, as elsewhere, is characterised by value pluralism, value conflicts and deep disagreement. Democratic deliberation is the solution based on the principle of equality. Thus, a common space of reason, civil discourse and respect for persons as equal and reasonable participants in public debates needs to be fostered. This is democracy by design in the domain of ethics. In the context of ethical pluralism, there is an increasing need for shared ethical values and principles in the face of scientific and technological advancement through balanced critical reflection and dialectic argumentation. These shared values can be

60 European Commission, Commission Work Programme 2020: A Union that strives for more, COM(2020)37 final of 29.1.2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0037>



inspired from the horizon of fundamental human rights as a conceptual framework since they are endorsed in national constitutions and international documents. Global and intergenerational justice have to be taken seriously into consideration since the impact of the emerging technologies has no boundaries over space and time.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that it has been my honour and privilege to serve as a member of the EGE for sixteen years. This enriching experience has broadened my perspective on European institutions and deepened my interest in European ethics which I am now sharing with my postgraduate students at the University of Malta in a study-unit on emerging European values and policies in frontier technologies. I must admit that I have learnt more than I contributed in our discussions and deliberations.

Our EGE monthly meetings have been a veritable source of information and ethical insights! Though we differed in many ways in our perspectives, we respected each other! We disagreed on many issues, yet we struggled to find a consensus! We came from different backgrounds, nevertheless we worked together and learned from each other!

Together we have contributed to shape the ethical direction in science, technology and innovation on the European landscape. Together we witnessed Europe as a project that evolves every day. Together we noticed a shift of ethical concerns from the domain of biotechnologies to the digital technologies. Together we faced the complex ethical challenges and collaborated relentlessly to consolidate the European values of tomorrow in the domain of science and new technologies.

## WEBINAR ON DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE 3 JUNE 2021

### INTERVENTION BY NICOLA SPERANZA, SECRETARY GENERAL, FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILY ASSOCIATIONS IN EUROPE (FAFCE)



Merci beaucoup. Merci tout d'abord à vous M. Hölvényi et à M. Olbrycht pour cette possibilité de parler ensemble des Etats généraux de la natalité et aussi pour l'excellente coopération avec l'Unité pour le Dialogue Interculturel et Religieux du Groupe PPE. Merci également au Président du Groupe, M. Manfred Weber, au Secrétaire général, Simon Busuttill, et aux nombreux députés qui ont adapté leurs agendas pour être présents aujourd'hui.

Quelqu'un m'a posé la question : qu'est qu'il y a derrière ce webinaire ? La réponse est simple : notre volonté d'alerter sur l'hiver démographique, comme notre Fédération le fait depuis des années. Nous avons la mission de parler avec tout le monde, et – en tant que représentants de 27 associations familiales de 17 pays différents – nous avons la responsabilité de porter la voix des familles et leurs inquiétudes réelles, quotidiennes, auprès des institutions européennes. Mais cela représente seulement un premier volet de la mission de notre Fédération. L'autre aspect est celui de favoriser le réseau et la mise en commun des expériences des associations familiales catholiques en Europe et celui d'assurer le développement pour le Bien Commun. D'où la présence, aujourd'hui, de certains des plus importants responsables d'associations familiales dans l'Union européenne.

Quel est le rôle de ces associations? Dans un monde dans lequel l'individualisme et le consumérisme semblent prévaloir, nos associations oeuvrent pour la solidarité dans la lutte contre la pandémie cachée de nos jours qu'est la solitude.

La solitude est étroitement liée au changement démographique que nous vivons aujourd'hui en Europe, alors que les personnes âgées constituent un groupe de plus en plus important dans la population et que les européens ont de moins en moins d'enfants. Comme le souligne le Document de réflexion que nous avons publié avec la COMECE sur « Les personnes âgées et l'avenir de l'Europe », le fait que les européens vivent plus longtemps est une très bonne nouvelle, mais dans un même temps, l'Union européenne a de moins en moins d'enfants».

Le 5 mars 2021, le Parlement européen, la Commission européenne et le Conseil de l'UE ont publié une déclaration commune pour la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe, qui comprenait la solidarité intergénérationnelle comme sujet clé. Cependant, la solidarité intergénérationnelle, ce qui veut dire entre plusieurs générations, ne peut pas exister sans une nouvelle génération pour la soutenir – alors que nous allons vers une société 'monogénérationnelle'. Et la famille est le centre, le 'hub' on dirait en anglais, le pôle central de cet échange.

Au cours de la crise mondiale actuelle, tout cela est devenu encore plus clair. En effet, comme la FAFCE l'a maintes fois souligné, les familles représentent le coeur de la reprise post-pandémique (Résolution du Conseil de Présidence de la FAFCE, 10 novembre 2020).



Les « États généraux de la natalité » à Rome le 14 mai dernier ont représenté un moment historique, car pour la première fois celle qui se présente comme la classe dirigeante d'un pays s'est réunie, avec le Premier Ministre Mario Draghi, autour du sujet de la natalité, reconnaissant l'urgence d'agir de manière concrète pour des politiques qui remettent la famille au centre, car « si les familles ne sont pas au centre du présent, il n'y aura pas d'avenir: mais si les familles repartent, tout repart », comme l'a dit le Pape François.

La présence du Pape François a donné aux « États généraux de la natalité » un écho qui va bien au-delà des Alpes, car la question du changement démographique est une question non seulement européenne mais même globale (il suffit de lire le New York Times, qui a parlé récemment de changements liés au vieillissement des populations avec des changements d'une ampleur difficile à croire, ou bien de regarder le changement de politique en Chine, qui jusqu'il y a quelques années avait promu la politique de l'enfant unique). Notre avenir est en jeu et ce webinaire s'insère donc à juste titre dans le cadre de la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe.

Nous sommes ravis de ce dialogue avec les députés européens aujourd'hui. Dans ce contexte, les associations familiales ont un rôle important, car elles font en sorte que « les familles - comme le dit l'encyclique Familiaris Consortio de St. Jean Paul II – aient une conscience toujours plus vive d'être les 'protagonistes' de ce qu'on appelle 'la politique familiale' et qu'elles assument la responsabilité de transformer la société ».

#### INTERVENTION BY PASCALE MORINIÈRE, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILY ASSOCIATIONS (CNAFC), FRANCE



La question démographique française

En France, la question de la natalité a longtemps été un sujet de satisfaction puisque nous avons de longue date un taux de fécondité record par rapport aux autres pays européens. Nous imputons cela à une politique familiale particulièrement ambitieuse, mais sans avoir la preuve de la corrélation avec la natalité.

Evoquer des politiques natalistes a longtemps été peu audible dans le débat public puisque d'une part le contexte ne s'y prêtait pas et que d'autre part cela évoquait des politiques suspectes d'aller contre les libertés individuelles.

A partir de 2013, sous le gouvernement Hollande, de nombreuses mesures anti-familles ont été prises concernant la fiscalité des familles ou les congés parentaux. Aussitôt après, dès 2014, l'indice de fécondité a commencé à diminuer.

Or, nous étions auparavant sur un plateau autour de 2 enfants par femme, presque au seuil de renouvellement des générations à 2,1 enfants par femme, et ce depuis 2006.

Depuis 2014, l'indice de fécondité diminue donc chaque année. Il est descendu à 1,83 enfants par femme en 2019.

Dans le même temps, les Français souhaitent toujours autant d'enfants ! Ils ont été interrogés en 2011 et 2021. Les réponses ont été les mêmes à 10 ans d'écart : les Français souhaitent exactement 2,39 enfants. Entre le nombre d'enfants souhaités et l'indice de fécondité, 2,39 moins 1,83, il y a 0,56 point. Les Français auraient donc volontiers « un demi enfant de plus », ou une famille sur deux aurait un enfant de plus si chacun accueillait le nombre d'enfants souhaités!

De 1994 à 2006 la fécondité avait augmenté grâce à de nombreuses mesures pro familles. L'inverse s'est produit à partir de 2014 lorsque ces mesures ont été rabotées. La politique familiale a donc un véritable impact sur l'accueil des enfants. Nous sommes toujours en tête de la natalité européenne, mais nous prenons conscience que nous devons nous aussi nous préoccuper sérieusement de ce sujet.

Notre Haut Commissaire au Plan, François Bayrou, vient de publier il y a 10 jours un rapport qui propose d'adopter un « pacte national pour la démographie » comprenant des mesures fortes de politique familiale dans trois grands domaines : « les congés accordés aux parents, les prestations familiales et l'accompagnement de la petite enfance ». Nous nous réjouissons de cette parole publique sur un sujet jusqu'alors désinvesti par les responsables politiques. Cette prise de position est motivée par notre système social français qui repose sur un modèle de société où « tous contribuent pour chacun ». Cela concerne bien entendu notre système de retraite par répartition mais aussi « (...) l'éducation, (...) la santé, la solidarité, l'assurance notamment en matière de chômage, tout cela relève en fait d'un principe de répartition de la charge et du risque sur l'ensemble de la population active. »

Pour nous, AFC, nous préconisons un certain nombre de mesures, présentées il y a quelques jours au secrétariat d'État aux Familles et à l'Enfance, afin de soutenir la natalité.

Les grands principes en sont les suivants :

1) Différencier la politique familiale qui doit être universelle afin de soutenir les couples qui font l'effort de mettre au monde les enfants (qui contribueront demain à la solidarité nationale) de la politique sociale, qui vise à lutter contre les inégalités.

2) Développer des politiques globales, cohérentes, pérennes et lisibles.

La volonté de prendre en compte la natalité, si elle est motivée par des préoccupations économiques, doit aussi être motivée par l'état d'esprit général que génère une fécondité dynamique. Le pape François l'a exprimé lors des États généraux de la natalité italiens : « Les enfants sont l'espoir qui fait renaitre un peuple ». Autrement dit, il existe un cercle vertueux entre l'optimisme, voire l'espérance, d'une société et sa natalité. Notre vieux continent a un besoin urgent de croire en lui-même et à avoir confiance en son avenir en mettant au monde et en s'engageant généreusement pour de nouvelles générations. Nous espérons que ce premier rapport sera suivi d'effets, en particulier à l'occasion des élections présidentielles et législatives de 2022.

#### INTERVENTION BY ULRICH HOFFMAN, PRESIDENT OF FAMILIENBUND DER KATHOLIKEN, GERMANY



Dear Members of the European Parliament, dear colleagues,

Thank you very much for the occasion to make some final remarks. I am very pleased about the previous statements and the panel discussion. It shows that the demographic problem has been identified and that we are working together on a solution. In addition to many important things which have already been said, I would like to add a few thoughts.

At first, a quote of one of the founding fathers of the European Union. Konrad Adenauer, first chancellor of West Germany, was once asked the following question: Should the German pension insurance take into account whether a person has brought up children? His counsellor recommended such a family bonus.



Otherwise, there could be an economic incentive not to have children. This could – in the long run – destabilize the pension insurance in which the pensions of the elderly are paid by the younger generation. Adenauer’s answer was more or less the following: “A family bonus is not necessary. People will always get children.”

Since those ancient times, the European birth rate dropped dramatically: From around 2.7 children per woman in the 1950s to around 1.6 children per woman today. In a lot of European countries, the birth rate is even lower. We can see now: It is not a law of nature anymore that people get children. But I am convinced: Family and social politics can influence the birth rate and raise it again.

The key issue is: What is a good family policy with a positive impact on demography? I would like to highlight three points:

- › First: work-life-balance
- › Second: Enough time for family life
- › Third: Fair recognition of the care-work of the families

#### Point 1: Work-life-balance

Many young people today want to have both a fulfilling job and a family. Therefore it is important that every family has the right to a childcare infrastructure of high quality. There should be quality standards which ensure that childcare centres are places of education and social learning. It is also important that the labour law gets more family-friendly. There should be more flexibility for parents. Besides flexible working hours, parents should have the right to work from home and take a day off when the child spontaneously needs the parents’ care.

#### This leads to point 2: Enough time for family life

It is important that families have enough time together. Good relationships need time. Too often, work-life-balance is interpreted as a means to adapt the families to economic needs. But on the contrary, the economy should be adapted to the needs of the families. The families should be the starting point and the centre of all family policies. And since the wishes of the families are as different as the European families themselves, there should not be a “one-size-fits-all solution” for all families. Instead, a legal framework should give many options to the families so that they can find their individual work-life-balance.

In the long term, there should be a parental leave of at least one year in all European countries. Moreover, when the children are older, parents should have the right to reduce their working hours for a limited amount of time according to their wishes. This would allow them to take care good of their children in difficult times and come back to their normal working hours when the children do not need their support anymore. And, of course, there should be a financial compensation for families so that families can afford to reduce their working hours to care for their families.

#### Point 3: Fair recognition of the care-work of the families

Financial compensation for families must not be seen as social welfare. Families are not welfare recipients, they are high performers. They merit compensation for their indispensable care-work. They earn it for their contribution to our social security systems and – generally speaking – for their contribution to the future of our society, for upholding our values and our culture. Support for families is just and fair. It is an investment in the future. If there are structural disadvantages for families, families will get less children than they wish to have. But if there is a family-friendly framework, people will realize their wishes to have children and family life in Europe will flourish again. Thank you!

## WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE CONFLICT IN TIGRAY AND THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN ETHIOPIA 23 NOVEMBER 2021

INTERVENTION BY HAGOS ABRHA ABAY (PHD, ETHIOPIAN PHILOLOGY), POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW IN CSMC, HAMBURG UNIVERSITY, ASS. PROFESSOR IN MEKELLE UNIVERSITY (ST. YARED CENTER), FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL COORDINATOR OF «MAHILETE GUMAYE», INITIATIVES FOR CULTURE (MAGIC) IN TIGRAY



Not only in its geo-political setting, at the Red Sea corridor, but Tigray has also been an important center in the three thousand years’ Ethiopian history. This made Tigray the origin of the three Abrahamic religions in the country, and the home of tremendous cultural and religious heritages including its ancient writing system through which were produced various inscriptions and manuscripts; Tigray preserved the earliest surviving gospel manuscript in the Christian world dated to the 6th CE (i.e., the Gospel of Gärima). It is also a foundation for hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian indigenous written artifacts, of various themes, written in Gə’əz. As a center of literacy and urbanization, today’s Tigray had become metro and cosmopolitan of the East African region during the Aksumite time. It was also center of political diplomacy, which made it the first region in the sub-Saharan to introduce Christianity and Islamic religions and to host refugees/diasporas from the outside world into Africa: the Nine Saints, Roman-Byzantine monks, who were said to have escaped from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, and the Mohamed family after they were troubled by the Quraish in the 7th CE. The center of ‘Abyssinians’, mentioned in the Qur’an and positively portrayed in response to the good deeds of Christian King Armah of Aksum, is in today’s Tigray.

In the 6th CE, King Kaleb of Aksum had sent military support to protect the Najran Christians from their random massacre by Dhü Nuwäs, Judaized ruler of Yemen in 523 CE. So, the people of Tigray have been devoted to being voice of the suppressed with a practical devotion to host refugees: from those Aksumite diasporas up to the 2021 Eritrean refugees in Tigray. Tigray is the home of enormous and precious treasures. More than 97% of Tigray population are now followers of Christianity, and the church of Aksum Zion, “The dwelling of the Ark of the Covenant” is called ረዕሰ ኢድባራት ወገናማት (lit. head of Churches and Monasteries) in Ethiopia; that is why the Ethiopian patriarch is intitled “The Archbishop of Aksum”; the canonical laws of Ethiopian Orthodox Church instigated from Aksum under a motto of ብግ ይወጥሳ እምፅዮን (lit. the law comes out of Zion/Akum). Thus, the patriarchate office is always assumed to be in Aksum rather than in Addis Ababa. Most of the Ethiopian medieval and modern kings, except Menelik II, until Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-74) were crowned in Aksum but did not make their royal centers in Aksum; this is because Aksum is assumed to be the sacred and holy place, seat of the religious leaders and distant from the secular/worldly life but was a very important figure even for the politics. Tigray is also the cradle of monastic cult in Africa next to Egypt; today we have thousands of churches and monasteries (~150 of them rock hewn) with the oldest Ethiopian monastery of Däbrä Dammo, which was also bombed during this crises; 5 Eritrean soldiers were said to have climbed on the mountain after bombing, intimidated the monastic elders, and they found one person who died of the bomb damage.

After the conflict broke out on 4 November 2020, Tigray fell into a serious catastrophe: human carnage, heritage destruction and value vandalization. All the brutalities were committed by the allied forces of



Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), Amhara Forces (Amhara Militia and Amhara Special Forces). International support, like the UAE drones, were also said to be part of the hostility. Within a year, hundreds of thousands of civil Tigrayans are believed to have been killed. There are a number of places where mass killings/massacres were committed: May-kadra Massacre, Aksum Massacre, Dengelet Massacre, Selekleka Massacre, Hirimi Massacre, Bora Massacre, Mahiberedego Massacre, Ahsi'a Massacre, Firedashum Massacre, Edaga Arbi Massacre, Firedashum Massacre, Abune Yim'atta Massacre, Togoga Airstrike, Humera Massacre, Humera Ethnic Cleansing, Wejjerat Massacre are some of them. Tens of thousands of women raped; Amnesty International on August 10, 2021, made an interview with 63 survivors of sexual violence. Based on this report, thousands of women were sexually abused, forced to have sex in front of their parents, murdered, or disabled for their refusal of forced sex, even forced to have sex with their relatives; Tigray health facilities reported 1,288 cases of gender-based violence only from February to April 2021. According to local community's view, tens of thousands of women were exposed to sexual abuse and which was committed intentionally for ethnic humiliation and harassment. Tens of thousands Ethnic Tigrayans are under mass arrest in various Ethiopian regions (mainly Addis Ababa); many have also been ethnically profiled and killed in the Ethiopian cities; a professor of chemistry in Bahirdar University (Amhara Region), among others, is said to have been killed because of his ethnic identity. Tigray Region has been in a total blackout for more than a year; million Tigrayans have been destabilized. Based on a BBC report, people who are in catastrophic starvation are estimated to 400,000 and more than 6 million people are in need of emergency aid, but still the Ethiopian government declared that there is no famine.

As ethnic cleansing and ethnic profiling have been part of the Tigray invasion, heritage icons and their guardians were targeted; this was aimed at discarding the social values. Religious leaders, monastic communities were intentionally killed, intimidated, and destabilized. Even though the conflict was triggered by the political differences of the Ethiopian central and Tigray regional governments/forces, various interested groups, who subscribed to the Ethiopian government, have also manipulated it into their own respective motives: value defamation, land grabbing, heritage destruction, etc. In February 2021, the Tigray Orthodox Church Diocese made a clear documentation of 326 members of church priests brutally killed, but many more were killed after that; and a priest in Tigray is multi-professional: religious leader, a church servant, a farmer, a manuscript producer, a traditional/church schoolteacher.

Hundreds of monasteries and churches were damaged and shelled; manuscripts, ecclesiastical materials, and private properties were looted and/or burned down. Moreover, archeological sites, museums, and historical places were part of the target of the brutality. Based on the Christian and cultural values in Ethiopia (mainly in Tigray), churches and monasteries were untouchable during crises, and were used as sanctuaries, reconciliation settings and conflict resolving institutions; elders and clergies were respected and used to have various customary laws of peace and stability. However, these days, those values happened to be vandalized when members of the previously mentioned forces abruptly entered temples during mass services for intimidation, hunted monks and priests from their caves and monasteries, raped elderly women and nuns in front of their relatives. The monastery of *Walda bba* (established 14th -15th CE) found in Western Tigray has more than 18 sections of monastic settlements of more than 1000 monks and estimated to 90 nuns (from all over Ethiopia, mainly from Tigray); this monastery is one of the most benchmarks of Ethiopian Christian monastic cult. In the 1970's revolution, some members of the Derg Regime were said to have fled to this monastery for asylum. During the current crises, many hundreds of Tigray origin monks were singled out of their own monastery, and casted for exiling; they had fled to various cities and deserts in Tigray and hiding themselves in caves and potholes. Abba Gäbrä Səlassie, among other six monks, was said to have

been killed in the monastery, while praying. Some other monks also died of hunger and long-distance travel. A 71-year-old, Abba Gäbrä Wahed is among those who died in deportation, and was buried in Aksum St. Mary Church (source: Tsegazeab Kidane).

And it is a historical irony when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Council (Synod) in Addis Ababa failed to condemn the brutalities against its own Christian community and heritages; only the patriarch, originally from Tigray, who was in a house arrest had condemned the crises but was, even, opposed by many members of the synod. Subsequently, the Tigray Orthodox Church Diocese, few months ago, made a press release against the reluctance of the Synod, and even claimed itself not to belong to the same church council if the disinclination continuous. There is a clear tendency for the division of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Tigrayans are now under long lasting trauma; many are questioning their belief and value systems; some raped women are committing suicide; this social crisis is the most lingering issue that may result to the values' decay.

Both tangible and intangible heritages were devastated; Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers have been transgressing and demolishing cultural norms, religious traditions, and good social values. Tigray children and women, monks and clergies happened to have bad experience of their cult vandalized after observing raping of teenagers and elderly women, and when those soldiers abruptly enter the temples and interrupting the mass service with brutal killings and intimidations of the clergies. More than 32 civilians and priests were said to have been killed by the Eritrean soldiers in the church of Medhaniealem Gu'tolo (a church dedicated to Jesus) during its holyday on 4 January, 2021. This church is found in Eastern Tigray; during the occasion, there was not a serious war around this area as the Tigray forces at that time were already cornered to the central west of Tigray. Two days after, which was Ethiopian Christmas holiday, the Eritrean soldiers continued to execute civilians and religious leaders around the village; generally, they killed more than 61 civilians (some of them priests) in that area. According to the local sources, the soldiers tortured some of the elders, if not killed, in front of their killed parents. Not only that, another church, nearby, called *Enda Qirkos Farädashum* (a church dedicated to St. Cyriacus) was destroyed and its heritages, both ecclesiastical materials and manuscripts, burned down. Mostly the soldiers loot materials of gold, silver, etc. for economic purpose, but they also loot other heritages like manuscripts intentionally. Among the hundreds of monasteries and churches affected by the war, about 35 of them have been documented; however, the degree of damage and other details are not well investigated as this assessment was preliminary and done from distance. Tigray is in a total blackout; communications for such assessments are possible only through satellite telephone, satellite image or from individuals who escaped the brutality. Therefore, some discrepancies may appear after full investigation is made during the post war; 29 of the following lists of monasteries and churches were already documented; now they became 35, and it is likely that more other damaged heritages will appear.

Therefore, significant religious and historical settings like Aksum (center of Christianity in Ethiopia), Däbrä Dammo (the oldest monastery), Waldəbba (the biggest and most well-established hermits' desert and monks' monastery in Ethiopia), Maryam Dängälät (newly discovered ancient value laden church), Däbrä Abbay (benchmark for traditional school in the flied of Qəddase, mass service), Samuel Qoyäsa (one of the places for the origin of the Stephanites, 16th century social revolutionary monks) were part of the targets. In most of these important monasteries and icons of Christianity, monks and civilians were executed, monks of Waldəbba are probably the biggest number, in East Africa, for Christian exile in our century. After leaving their caves and cloisters, some of them died of hunger and thirst; some others arrived in some cities; however,



| No | Monastery/Church           | Location                       | Damage/brutality  | Actors    |
|----|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------|
| 1  | Aksum St. Mary             | Aksum (Central Tigray)         | Targeted, and civilians <u>massacred</u> around the church.             | EDF, ENDF |
| 2  | Samuel Qoyäša              | Northwest Tigray               | Priests were killed; heritages looted.                                  | AF, ENDF  |
| 3  | Däbrä Abbay                | Northwest Tigray               | Civilians and priests were killed; heritages looted.                    | AF        |
| 4  | Abunä Tomas                | Northwest Tigray               | Heritages looted; several civilians were killed nearby.                 | EDF       |
| 5  | Abunä Zär'abruk            | Northwest Tigray               | Destroyed from Shelling.  | AF        |
| 6  | Maryam Mädhānit            | 'Addi Da'ro (Northwest Tigray) | Severely <u>damaged</u> .   | EDF, ENDF |
| 7  | 'Ānda Abunä Arägawi        | 'Addi Da'ro (Northwest Tigray) | Affected from shelling.   | EDF, ENDF |
| 8  | Mär'awe Kərstos            | Hərmi (Northwest Tigray)       | 40 civilians, 10 priests killed; manuscripts looted.                    | ASF, ENDF |
| 9  | Waləbba                    | Northwest Tigray               | 100s of monks were casted out; some tortured, killed, and exiled.       | AF        |
| 10 | Abunä Abrəham              | Gär'alta (Eastern Tigray)      | The monastery was shelled by bombs.                                     | EDF, ENDF |
| 11 | Abunä Yəm'atta             | Gär'alta (Eastern Tigray)      | Shelled, 19 civilians killed and 2 injured.                             | EDF       |
| 12 | 'Asira Mätira              | Eastern Tigray                 | Targeted, and heritages looted.   | EDF       |
| 13 | Şäşi Kidanäməhrät          | Central Tigray                 | Shelled.  | EDF       |
| 14 | 'Ānda-Amanuel Wuqro        | Wuqro (Eastern Tigray)         | Damaged.  | EDF       |
| 15 | 'Ānda Qirqos Ləgat         | Zalambäsa (Eastern Tigray)     | Destroyed of shelling.  | EDF       |
| 16 | Mäsälä Kərstos             | 'Asimba (Eastern Tigray)       | Totally <u>damaged</u> .  | EDF       |
| 17 | 'Ānda Mädhane-alem Gu'tolo | Eastern Tigray                 | Shelled, 61 civilians (5 of them priests) killed in the village nearby. | EDF       |

|    |                         |                                 |  |           |
|----|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--|-----------|
| 18 | Maryam Dängälät         | 'Ādga Həmus (Eastern Tigray)    | More than 150 civilians <u>massacred</u> .                                     | EDF       |
| 19 | Däbrä Dammo             | Eastern Tigray                  | Shelled; one person was killed.  | EDF       |
| 20 | 'Ānda-Abba Tadewos      | Tämben (Central Tigray)         | Shelled and vandalized.  | ENDF      |
| 21 | 'Āndabba Nob            | Tämben (Central Tigray)         | Shelled and vandalized.  | ENDF      |
| 22 | 'Ānda Qirkos Fərädashum | Eastern Tigray                  | The church was destroyed, heritages <u>burned down</u> .                       | EDF       |
| 23 | Yəha Monastery          | Yəha (Central Tigray)           | Heritages looted.  | EDF       |
| 24 | 'Āndabba Şəhma          | Central Tigray.                 | Shelled.   | EDF       |
| 25 | Maryam Wuqro            | Näbälät (Central Tigray)        | Shelled.   | EDF       |
| 26 | 'Āndabba Yohani         | 'Ādaga 'Arbi (Central Tigray)   | Shelled.   | ENDF      |
| 27 | Qäräşa Maryam           | Samrä (Southwest Tigray)        | Air bombed.  | ENDF, AF  |
| 28 | 'Ānda Amnuel            | Säharti (Southwest Tigray)      | Damaged.   | ENDF      |
| 29 | Maryam Q'wiha           | Mekelle (Tigray's capital)      | Soldiers, priests during the mass service.                                     | ENDF      |
| 30 | Abunä Arägawi Q'wiha    | Mekelle (Tigray's capital)      | Soldiers camped there for a short time and used to smoke cigarettes.           | ENDF      |
| 31 | Mikael 'Addi Mosno      | Southeastern Tigray             | Shelled.   | ENDF      |
| 32 | Abunä Tadewos           | Tselemti (North-Western Tigray) | Damaged by bombing (zu-23), and heritages (including manuscripts) looted.      | ENDF, AF  |
| 33 | Kidanäməhrät Amburko    | Tselemti (North-Western Tigray) | Damaged.   | ENDF, AF  |
| 34 | Jiwamarä Mika'el        | Tämben (Central Tigray)         | Damaged, and manuscripts were looted.  | ENDF, EDF |
| 35 | Ezgi'na Mam'at          | Wejjerat (Southeastern Tigray)  | Elders intimidated, and meals prepared for its anniversary day were destroyed. | ENDF      |



many of them were said to have joined to different other Tigray monasteries. The Monastery of Mär 'awe Kirs-tos is assumed to be one the known monasteries for asylum of the monks; of course, Amhara forces were said to have looted heritages and killed fifty civilians (ten of them priests) in this monastery itself. Not only asylums, churches and monasteries are believed to have a spiritual power to protect themselves; however, these days Christians hiding themselves in those religious places were hunted down, and the sanctuaries themselves were also destroyed. And this created doubt and confusion in the norms and believes of the society. In the traditional sense of Christianity in Ethiopia, most believers rely on the practical deeds of their religious leaders and their confession fathers rather than on the scriptures. However, many religious preachers, priests, and monks of Ethiopian Orthodox Church were part of the campaign during the brutalities in one or another way. Hence, fearing God, respecting elders, kissing hands/crosses of clergies, etc have been challenged those days. The norms and customary laws of tolerance for ethnic, religious, and other differences is eroded. Conflict resolution mechanisms have no meaning by now.

Not only monasteries and churches, but also museums and memorial heritages were destroyed; Emperor Yohannes IV museum and Tigray Martyrs Memorial Museum (found in Mekelle, Tigray's capital) are, among others, devastated by the members of the Ethiopian Defense Forces. al-Nājash Mosque (a symbol for Tigray as first Islamic settlement in Africa) was bombed, and damaged; the Tigray war is not a religious war; it is rather a political one unless it seems that there are some various interested groups to manipulate the war. Thus, as more than 96% of the Tigray population are followers of Orthodox Christianity, the damages and brutalities were mostly deployed over the Christian heritages. Generally, heritage icons, religious leaders, holydays, supplication settings, socio-cultural values have been vandalized by the joined forces who invaded Tigray. However, international responsible and capable bodies of human rights undermined the human carnage in Tigray; world Christian Ecumenism has no attention yet to the destabilizing of Christians and their monastic cults. The draft policy of the International Criminal Court (ICC) published on 22 March, 2021 article 8:41, and the policy document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention" (UNESCO, 2015) have given much emphasis on cultural heritages, and treat them under human rights; nonetheless not significant attention is given to the Tigray precious world heritages. Hence, the people of Tigray and the Tigray heritages are in an extreme demand of an international support.



## INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE UNIT DIRECTORATE OUTREACH



**Andrea LASKAVA,**  
Director, Outreach Directorate



**Romain STRASSER,**  
Head of Unit, Intercultural  
and Religious Dialogue Unit



**Josefina PELÁEZ,**  
Assistant to the Head of Unit,  
Intercultural and Religious  
Dialogue Unit



**Gábor TÖRÖK,**  
Policy Adviser, Intercultural  
and Religious Dialogue Unit



**Nora KRAMER,**  
Assistant, Intercultural  
and Religious Dialogue Unit



**Atilla AGÁRDI,**  
Press Adviser, Intercultural  
and Religious Dialogue Unit



**Monica DI MASSA,**  
Trainee, Intercultural  
and Religious Dialogue Unit













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Outreach Directorate

**Responsible:** Romain STRASSER, Head of Unit  
Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit, Outreach Directorate

**Address:** EPP Group in the European Parliament  
60, Rue Wiertz, B-1047 Brussels, Belgium

**Internet:** [www.eppgroup.eu](http://www.eppgroup.eu)

**E-mail:** [EPP-Interreligious@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:EPP-Interreligious@europarl.europa.eu)

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