



INTERCULTURAL & RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

ACTIVITY REPORT 2020

INTERCULTURAL & RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

ACTIVITY REPORT 2020

INTRODUCTION

Despite the numerous difficulties caused by the pandemic in 2020, the EPP Group managed to be prepared against the hardships by organising a wide range of events: the high-level EPP Group Annual Intercultural Dialogue Conference with Churches and Religious Institutions, regular Working Group meetings as well as video conferences with guest speakers from the EU and non-EU countries on current affairs related to religion(s).

Intercultural and Religious Dialogue is in its essence a people-to-people activity. However, the pandemic has changed the working routine of the EPP Group's Intercultural and Religious Dialogue. The Coronavirus pandemic has eliminated the tasks that Members normally do in the frame of Dialogue activities: there were no religious guests to meet in the EP, no visitors to welcome, no cultural exhibitions to perform, no thematic events to organize, no trips to book. Nonetheless, the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue went on in a good cooperative spirit and managed to adapt when necessary to the adverse circumstances. The newsletter "Intercultural and Religious Dialogue News from Europe and the World" was launched: it monitors new developments concerning religious issues, activities of Churches and faith-based organizations and State-Church relations in the EU as well as around the world. Moreover, video conferencing and meetings on-line became everyday practice and a considerable number of events could be held. Overall, the pandemic has not impeded but only restructured the work of our Intercultural and Religious Dialogue by promoting freedom of religion, and enhancing mutual understanding between cultural and religious groups.

Here below is a selection of posters illustrations detailing the EPP Group Working Group (WG) on Intercultural Activities and Interreligious Dialogue events in 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

DATE	ACTIVITY	PAGE NUMBER
14 January	Working Group Meeting presentation of ACN Report: "Persecuted and Forgotten?"	6
21 January	"What does it mean to be a Christian politician today?" meeting with Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich	8
29 January	Film screening: "Fierce Light" in cooperation with Chapel of Europe	10
4 February	"World Day of Human Fraternity" breakfast meeting	16
11 February	Working Group Meeting with Rev. Sören Lenz, Executive Secretary of Conference of European Churches (CEC)	17
3 March	Conference on Creating a New Narrative of Tolerance: The case of religious diversity in the United Arab Emirates	18
24 June	Webinar about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Churches - Churches' Social Teachings in response to COVID	28
9 September	Webinar on Fighting the effects of COVID in the Developing World – The role of Religious communities	34
8 - 10 October	XX. International Krakow Conference "Challenges for a new Europe"	42
13 October	Working Group Meeting about New Encyclical ("Fratelli tutti") of Pope Francis with Mons. Marco Ganci, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe	48
11 November	Follow-up Conference on "The next day in Syria" in cooperation with COMECE, CEC, CROCEU	52
20 November	Webinar about Lebanon after the Beirut port explosion	58
20 November	Working Group Meeting with H.E. Mons. Archbishop Alain Paul Lebaupin, Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union	61
9 December	XXIII. Annual EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue "The Future of Europe" Session I: The position of Churches and Religious Communities concerning Europe's future Session II: What do Churches and Religious Communities think of citizens' and faithful's expectations on the future of Europe	62

EPP Working Group INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Tuesday, 14 January 2020
European Parliament, Strasbourg

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Presentation of the latest Aid to the Church in **Need (ACN) Report: "Persecuted and Forgotten?"**
by: **Ms Marcela Szymanski**, EU Liaison Officer of the Aid to the Church in Need
3. Exchange of views
4. Any other business
5. Date of next meeting

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE REPORT: "PERSECUTED AND FORGOTTEN?"

As an organization providing emergency and pastoral relief in nearly 140 countries around the world, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is committed to chronicling and assessing human rights violations against Christians around the world. "Persecuted and Forgotten?", a Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2017-19 summarizes the findings of ACN's ongoing research, assessing recent patterns of hatred and discrimination. This latest edition examines key developments in 12 countries of core concern for Christians suffering human rights abuses. The report draws on fact-finding trips carried out by ACN staff to countries noted for persecution against Christians, for example northern Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria and other parts of the world which cannot be revealed because of security concerns. This report also shows that in a number of countries, Christian women suffer the most, with reports of abductions, forced conversions and sex attacks. In spite of the growing quantity of information on the subject, the extent of the crisis facing Christians persecuted for their faith remains little known and understood. While statistical research has offered considerable insight into the topic of Christian persecution, some data has not stood up to scrutiny and is unable to demonstrate that the violence in question is religiously motivated. Studies consistently show that Christians suffer significantly high levels of persecution and intolerance.



**Persecuted
and
Forgotten?** | **A report on Christians
oppressed for their faith
2017-19**

**A snapshot of a
deepening crisis**

 Aid to the
Church in Need
ACN UNITED STATES

George J. Marlin, Chairman
Sarkis Boghjalian, Executive Director

EPP Working Group INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Tuesday, 21 January 2020
European Parliament, Brussels

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Exchange of views on **“What does it mean to be a Christian politician today?”** with **H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., Archbishop of Luxembourg, President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)** and **Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of COMECE**.
3. Any other business
4. Date of next meeting

SUMMARY

The President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE) and Archbishop of Luxembourg, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., held a conversation with EPP Group Members



Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of COMECE and H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., Archbishop of Luxembourg, President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)

on how to inspire and encourage Christians to get involved in politics and public life. The Cardinal reflected on how Christian politicians could play an active and responsible role in legislation and decision-making processes in the EU. He recalled that Christianity not only provides for individual concerns, but for the ordering of a society with liberty and justice for all.



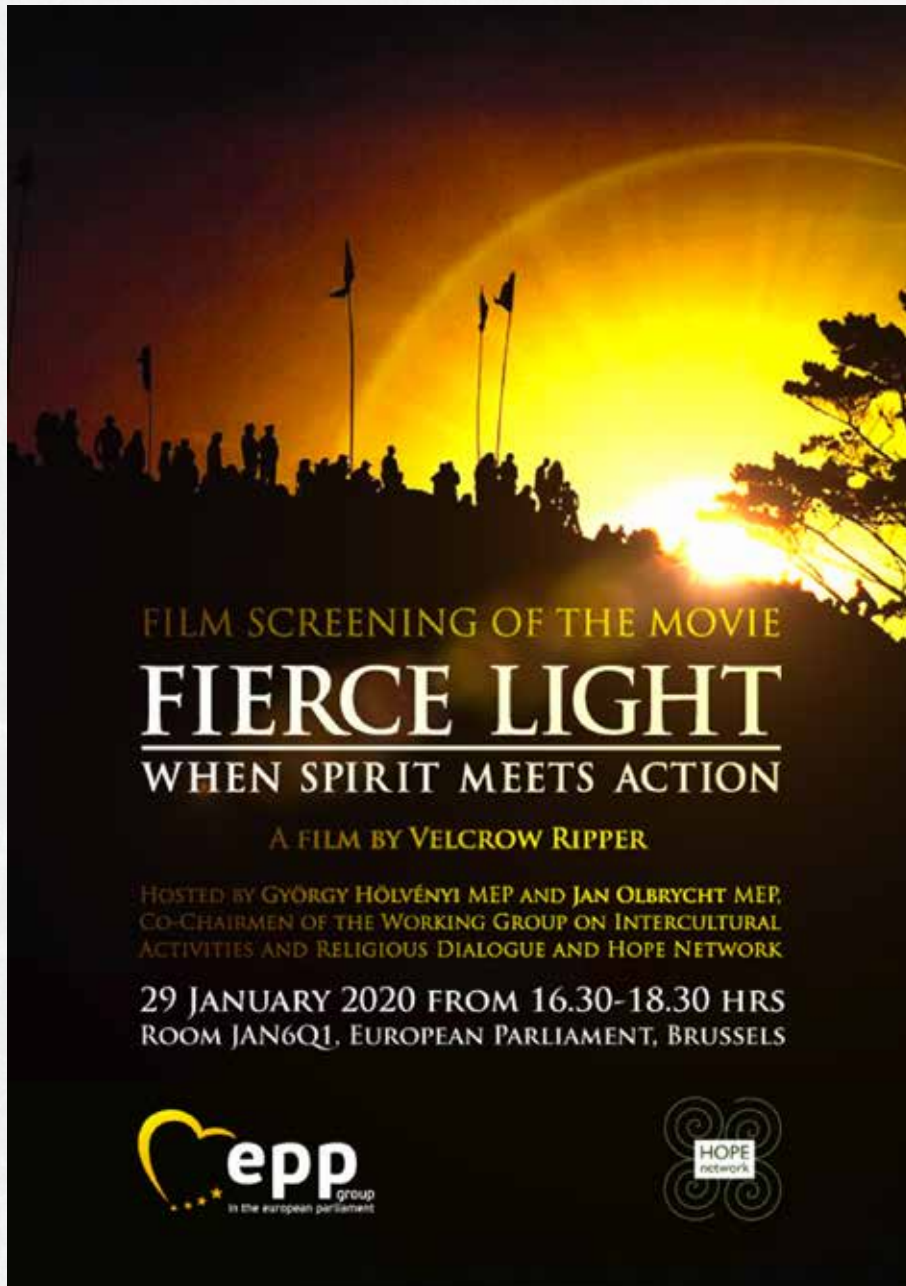
Rasa JUKNEVICIENE MEP, Romain STRASSER, Head of the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit, EPP Secretariat, H.E. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., Archbishop of Luxembourg, President of COMECE, Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of COMECE, Beatrice SCARASCIA MUGNOZZA, Former Director, National Parliaments and Intercultural Dialogue



Cindy FRANSSSEN MEP, François-Xavier BELLAMY MEP, Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, Željana ZOVKO MEP, Inese VAIDERE MEP



Jose Luis Bazan, Legal Adviser of COMECE, Isabel WISELER-LIMA MEP, Cindy FRANSSSEN MEP, Rasa JUKNEVICIENE MEP, Željana ZOVKO MEP, H.E. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., Archbishop of Luxembourg, President of COMECE, Inese VAIDERE MEP, György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, Tomislav SOKOL MEP, Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, Beatrice SCARASCIA MUGNOZZA, Former Director, National Parliaments and Intercultural Dialogue, Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of COMECE, Romain STRASSER, Head of the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit, EPP Secretariat, Nora KRAMER, Assistant, Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit, EPP Secretariat



EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

FILM SCREENING OF THE MOVIE:

“FIERCE LIGHT: WHEN SPIRIT MEETS ACTION”

Wednesday, 29 January 2020

16:30 – 18:30 hrs.

JAN 6Q1, European Parliament, Brussels

PROGRAMME

16:30 – 16:40 WELCOME

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural Activities and Religious Dialogue

Rozemarijn Vanwijnsberghe - InTouch - HOPE Network

16:40 – 18:10 FILM SCREENING

Fierce Light: When Spirit Meets Action is a 2008 documentary film written and directed by Velcrow Ripper that focuses on Spiritual Activism.

Fueled by the belief that “another world” is possible, Ripper explores the stories of people who have turned to spiritual activism as a means to cope with personal and global crises. The film contains interviews from Daryl Hannah, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu, Julia Butterfly Hill, Van Jones, Alice Walker, Joanna Macy, Noah Levine and John Lewis. Others featured include Michael Beckwith, Sera Beak, Ralph Nader among many others such as the original inspiration for the film, Brad Will.

The film is produced by the Fiercelight Films Inc. and the National Film Board of Canada and is distributed by Alive Mind.

18:10 – 18:30 DISCUSSION

Moderated by: **Rozemarijn Vanwijnsberghe** - InTouch - HOPE Network

Contributions:

Avi Tawil - Director at European Jewish Community Centre - HOPE Network

Krystian Sowa - Director at Chapel for Europe - HOPE Network

M.Denis Leblond - Buddhist Union of Belgium - HOPE Network

Yassir Bougatba - Just One - HOPE Network

Anna Krankenhagen - Representative of ASF Belgium

BACKGROUND

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE FILM:

Fierce Light: When Spirit Meets Action is a 2008 documentary film written and directed by Velcrow Ripper that focuses on Spiritual Activism.

Fueled by the belief that "another world" is possible, Ripper explores the stories of people who have turned to spiritual activism as a means to cope with personal and global crises. The film contains interviews from Daryl Hannah, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu, Julia Butterfly Hill, Van Jones, Alice Walker, Joanna Macy, Noah Levine and John Lewis. Others featured include Michael Beckwith, Sera Beak, Ralph Nader among many others such as the original inspiration for the film, Brad Will.

The film is produced by the Fiercelight Films Inc. and the National Film Board of Canada and is distributed by Alive Mind.

HOPE NETWORK:

'HOPE' network (Homes Of Presence and Encounter) wishes to form a network of persons, communities, associations and institutions. It commits to promoting a culture of dialogue, to orienting spiritual life and transformative action in society towards the in-depth encounter with the other in order to build together reconciliation, peace and living together.

HOPE thinks that pluralism in our multicultural and multi-convictional societies invites people to a spiritual evolution in order to live in harmony with each other. HOPE believes that there is an underlying Unity to that diversity which everyone can discover while deepening her/his own humanity. HOPE believes that education can contribute to this discovery and bring about a growth and

transformation of individuals and communities. It is convinced that all together people can contribute to a reconciled and fraternal humanity that promotes living together and peace - while facing contemporary challenges.

HOPE NETWORK'S PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS:

- a. The European Jewish Community Centre (EJCC)
- b. Chapel for Europe
- c. Buddhist Union of Belgium (UBB)
- d. Just One
- e. InTOUCH

The European Jewish Community Centre (EJCC)

EJCC aims to strengthen ties and create bridges between the EU Institutions and Jewish values. Through diverse events, seminars and meetings in the premises of the EU institutions, officials and civil servants can discover the wealth of Judaism, as a comprehensive and inclusive role player in European culture, and the universality of its values.

The EJCC is present in the EU Institutions through the organization of events, conferences, seminars, and meetings, in the premises of the EU in order to provide more information on Jewish topics and promote Jewish culture. Throughout the years, high-ranking personalities and decision makers have been attending and supported EJCC projects and events. EJCC is located at the European Jewish Building in the heart of the European Quarter in Brussels.

EJCC is a people oriented, community-driven organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of Jewish life through educational and cultural events. The centre is multi-lingual, serving the needs of government officials, diplomats, journalists and consultants to the EU.

Its mission is to promote Jewish culture in the European Union and its institutions by creating a dynamic centre for anyone interested in Jewish Culture, nourishing a community in all its diversity. To strengthen Jewish identity, nurturing a meaningful Jewish life with an eye on progress, and consistent with today's world.

Chapel for Europe

The Chapel for Europe (Aisbl), established in 2001 in Brussels, is a non-profit international association with aims to develop spiritual, social and cultural activities especially for civil servants of the European institutions and for inhabitants of Brussels region, often of multicultural and multiconfessional background, interested in getting together to pray and celebrate but also to reflect and exchange on the important European, spiritual and social issues. It does function as a chapel, with all its pastoral activities. In addition, its social and cultural events represent an important part of its activities as an Aisbl.

The mission of the Chapel for Europe is based on ethical values inspired by the Gospel, especially human dignity, reconciliation, solidarity and in search of the common good. Chapel for Europe, together with other organisations, is a co-founder of the HOPE network.

Buddhist Union of Belgium (UBB)

The UBB is the central body bringing together all the Buddhist associations and traditions present on Belgian territory.

Its objective, assigned by the state, is to prepare the official recognition of Buddhism in Belgium through the establishment of quality conviction teaching, training for chaplaincy, assistance in hospitals, as well as participation in Belgian society as a whole. At present, the UBB brings together about thirty different associations, bringing together the four great Buddhist traditions, with a total of around 150,000 sympathizers.

Just One

Just One works for dialogue and connects people from diverse backgrounds who do not necessarily cross paths otherwise.

With the aim of building a new, more human, open and loving way of living together, Just One engages in cultural, cultural, social and humanistic projects to re-enchant the vision of collective strength and to find what is missing in each person and in our societies today: memory, connection and meaning.

InTOUCH

In a globalized and pluralized world, identity closure is omnipresent. At the same time, more and more people are becoming aware of the need to search for what unites us, to live together reconciled and in peace and to grow in humanity. This search connects two driving forces in people's lives: the external activist part and the quest for understanding their inner self (what some call spirituality). To achieve this balance, while advancing on a path that invites to gradually uncover the underlying Unity that each person pursues according to his or her own path, is the objective of inTOUCH. By actively seeking collaborations with many partners, inTOUCH follows an approach that encompasses 4 fundamentals:

1. The One - spirituality: cultivating the inner life
2. The True - Study: Forming for an interreligious and interconvictional world
3. Beauty - art: approaching the Mystery through art and music
4. Le Bon - l'engagement citoyen: caring for young people and vulnerable people in our neighbourhoods

In 2020, inTOUCH's vision is shared in the HOPE Network.

OTHER ORGANISATION INVOLVED IN THE PANEL DISCUSSION

ASF

For over 60 years, ASF (ASF België vzw - Vredesdienst/ASF Belgique asbl - Service de Paix) has been committed to working toward reconciliation and peace, as well as fighting racism, discrimination and social exclusion.

Today, these aims are continued and realised through the long-term international peace service programme. This is known as peace service because, in co-operation with our partners, volunteers develop their understanding of history and other cultures and societies, whilst experiencing and accepting different patterns of thought and behaviour. Nowadays, due to generational change, ASF volunteers do not act from a feeling of personal guilt, but rather from the conviction that they want to make a positive contribution toward a more peaceful, just and tolerant world.

Every year around 180 volunteers, mostly aged between nineteen and twenty five are active for ASF in thirteen different countries on a variety of educational, historical, political and social projects.



M. Denis Leblond - Buddhist Union of Belgium - HOPE Network, Fr. Krystian Sowa - Director at Chapel for Europe - HOPE Network, Rozemarijn Vanwijnsberghe - In Touch - HOPE Network, György Hólvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, Avi Tawil - Director at European Jewish Community Centre - HOPE Network, Anna Krankenhagen - Representative of ASF Belgium, Yassir Bougatba - Just One - HOPE Network

EPP Working Group INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Tuesday, 4 February 2020
European Parliament, Brussels

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. **Abu Dhabi Declaration “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”**:
Exchange of views to commemorate the first anniversary of the signature by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
3. Any other business
4. Date of next meeting



SUMMARY

EPP Group Members and participants commemorated the first anniversary of the signature of the Document “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on 4 February 2019. The Document found a strong echo worldwide leading the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution on 21 December 2020 declaring 4 February as the International Day of Human Fraternity. The day is to be observed each year, beginning in 2021.

EPP Working Group INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Tuesday, 11 February 2020
European Parliament, Strasbourg

AGENDA

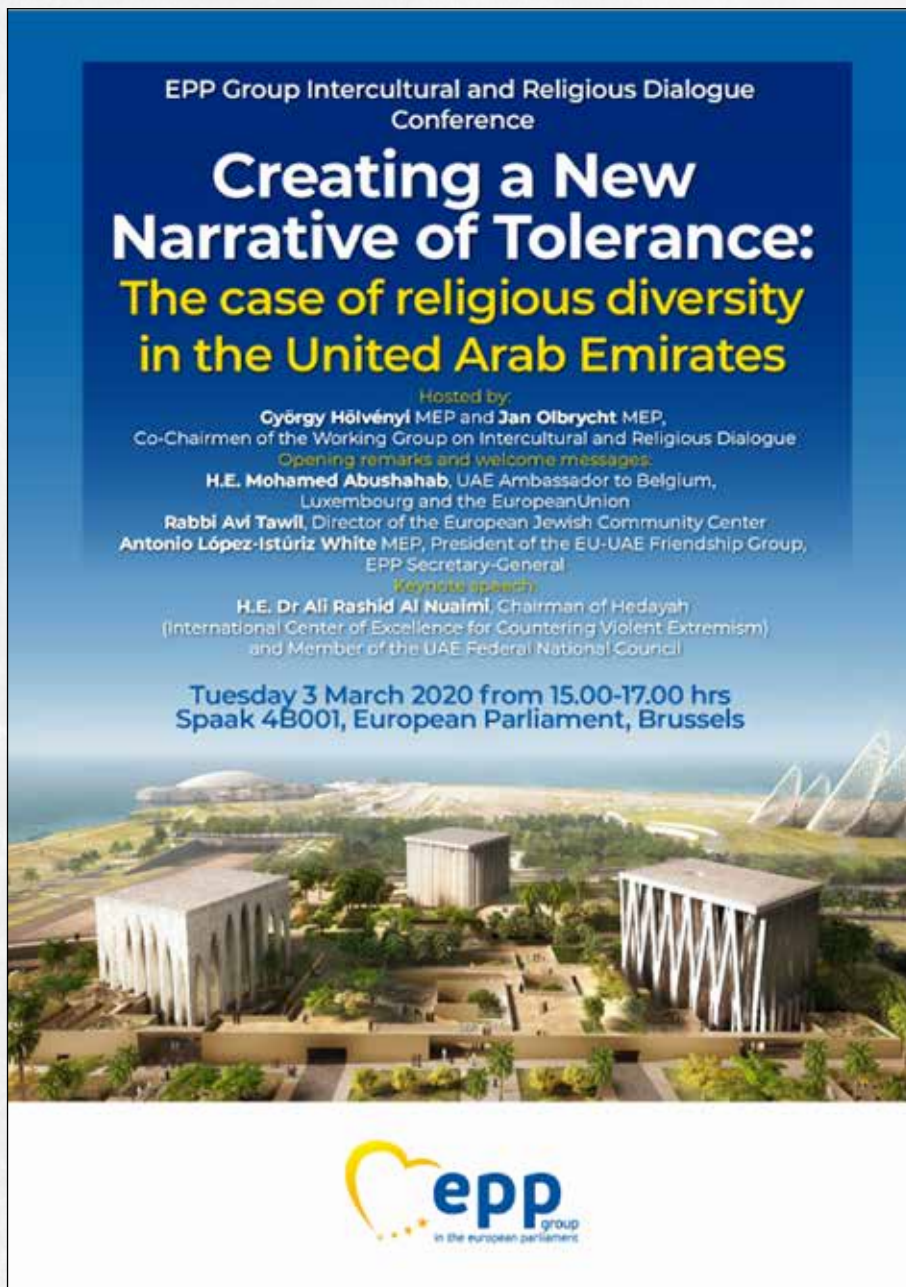
1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Exchange of views with Rev. **Sören Lenz, Executive Secretary of Conference of European Churches (CEC)** and presentation of the book on **“Human Rights, Religious Freedom and Faces of Faith”**
3. Any other business
4. Date of next meeting

SUMMARY

The Church representative gave a comprehensive overview about CEC’s work in the field of bio-ethics, human rights and engagement with the Council of Europe and other European Institutions.



Josefina PELAEZ, Assistant to the Head of Unit, Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit, EPP Secretariat, Rasa JUKNEVICIENE MEP, Rev. Sören Lenz, Executive Secretary of Conference of European Churches, Karlo RESSLER MEP, Lukas MANDL MEP, Pernille WEISS MEP, Mairead MCGUINNESS MEP, Beatrice SCARASCIA MUGNOZZA, Former Director, National Parliaments and Intercultural Dialogue



EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
Conference


Creating a New Narrative of Tolerance: The case of religious diversity in the United Arab Emirates

Hosted by:
Cyörgy Hölvényi MEP and **Jan Olbrycht** MEP,
Co-Chairmen of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Opening remarks and welcome messages:
H.E. Mohamed Abushahab, UAE Ambassador to Belgium,
Luxembourg and the European Union
Rabbi Avi Tawil, Director of the European Jewish Community Center
Antonio López-Istúriz White MEP, President of the EU-UAE Friendship Group,
EPP Secretary-General

Keynote speech:
H.E. Dr Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of Hedayah
(International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism)
and Member of the UAE Federal National Council

Tuesday 3 March 2020 from 15.00-17.00 hrs
Spaak 4B001, European Parliament, Brussels



epp group
in the european parliament

CONFERENCE

Creating a New Narrative of Tolerance: The case of religious diversity in the United Arab Emirates

Tuesday, 3 March 2020

PROGRAMME

15:00-15:15 OPENING REMARKS AND WELCOME MESSAGES

H.E. Mohamed Abushahab, UAE Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union

Rabbi Avi Tawil, Director of the European Jewish Community Center

Antonio López-Istúriz White MEP, President of the EU-UAE Friendship Group, EPP Secretary-General

15:15-15:45 KEYNOTE SPEECH

H.E. Dr Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of Hedayah (International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism); and Member of the UAE Federal National Council

15:45-17:00 PRESENTATIONS

The state of Christian communities in Gulf countries

Fr. Michael O'Sullivan, Representative of the Apostolic Vicar: Bishop Paul Hinder OFM, Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia, Abu Dhabi

Book presentation: 'Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the United Arab Emirates'

Rev. Canon Andrew Thompson, Chaplain of St Andrew's Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi

Jean Candiotte, Contributor, "Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the UAE" Book

Presentation of the Abrahamic Family House project – Behind the scenes of a Mega project of inclusion

Ross Kriel, President of the Jewish Community of the Emirates (JCE)

SUMMARY

The United Arab Emirates has a diverse mix of nationalities, religions and minorities. The aim of the event was to shed light on the religious and cultural diversity of the UAE, with the help of a special book released in 2019: 'Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the United Arab Emirates'. 2019 has been the UAE's "Year of Tolerance". The UAE government initiative aimed to reject extremism and entrench values of tolerance, dialogue, coexistence and openness to different cultures. To celebrate the Year of Tolerance, a diverse group of faiths have collaborated in producing this book, which serves as a compendium of their experiences of coexisting peacefully in the country. With so much bad news coming out of the Middle Eastern region regarding hostile relationships, the authors of the book want to provide good news by presenting an alternative narrative, which give people hope that religious communities can play a key role in creating a peaceful society. Presenting the book, Reverend Andrew Thompson, Chaplain of St Andrew's Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi, highlighted that it aims at celebrating this diversity and building greater understanding amongst communities on different rituals and customs.

BACKGROUND

Jewish community in the UAE

"The fact that, for the first time in centuries, a new Jewish community established in the heart of the Arab world is nothing short of historic. This represents, in a way, its own call to prayer and I speak on behalf of the Jewish community, it's our responsibility to answer," said the newly-announced Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of the UAE, Yehuda Sarna, during a speech on Tolerance Day on November¹⁵.

Although the UAE never had a significant history with Jews, their government is still pioneering tolerance as a move to highlight the UAE as a global capital for acceptance and to instill the values of co-existence and peace in local, regional and international communities.

"We have slowly found our place in the ecosystem of the UAE," Ross Kriel, the president of a Jewish Community in the UAE, told the Associated Press in October.

"It reflects our optimism about the future of the UAE as a place for us to commune, contribute and flourish."

One of the pillars of the Year of Tolerance was to solidify the UAE as the global capital for tolerance. The Year of Tolerance included a visit by Pope Francis, an inter-faith conference including American rabbis and Christian evangelicals, and the creation of a Ministry of Tolerance.¹

Christian communities in the Gulf countries

Christians in the Gulf are of Arab, Asian and European descent comprising Greek Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants. Generally speaking, the Christian communities enjoy freedom of worship in these countries each in its own Church except for Saudi Arabia which prohibits such an activity while 900,000 Catholics live on its soil.

In the last 10 years a number of the Gulf capitals witnessed the building of new Churches which in fact reflects the embodiment of interreligious dialogue and freedom of worship, and translates on the ground, the language of life in common. Churches are prohibited from launching evangelization campaigns or distributing printed material proselytizing to Christianity in accordance with an understanding and an agreement with the administrators and leaders of these Churches.²

According to Father Bernardo Cervellera, director of Asia News, Gulf countries like the UAE, Qatar and Oman where Christians from around the world have come to live and work, show that coexistence between Islam and Christianity in a modern Muslim society is possible.

"The UAE and other Gulf countries set a positive model that can be an example also to neighbouring countries like Saudi Arabia, for instance, where to this day Christians are not allowed to practice their faith," said Cervellera.

The total number of Christians in Gulf countries amounts to approximately 4 million, but they are mainly economic migrants of different nationalities who stay in the region for a limited amount of time due to tight restrictions on residency.

In the rest of the region, the numbers of communities of indigenous Christians, whose presence dates back centuries, are in decline.

The visit of Pope Francis to the Gulf comes at a time of upheaval for Christian communities in the Middle East.

As a result of the protracted wars and ongoing instability, about 50 percent of all Christians have fled the region over the last five decades, with an acceleration over the past few years following persecutions by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS).³

¹ <https://gulfnnews.com/uae/how-a-tolerant-uae-is-welcoming-jews-into-the-country-1.1574598576257>

² <http://en.lpij.org/2012/08/17/status-of-christians-and-their-churches-in-the-gulf/>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/pope-francis-seeks-dialogue-trip-uae-190203060859000.html>

Abrahamic Family House

Located on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi, the Abrahamic Family House will serve as a community for inter-religious dialogue and exchange, nurturing the values of peaceful co-existence and acceptance among different beliefs, nationalities and cultures.

This landmark initiative will be a place for learning, understanding and worship—open to all and a true reflection of the UAE’s values of tolerance and hospitality.

Within each of the houses of worship, visitors will have the opportunity to observe religious services, listen to Holy Scripture and experience sacred rituals. A fourth space—not affiliated with any specific religion—will serve as a center for all people of goodwill to come together as one. The community will also offer educational and event-based programming.⁴

Plans by British architect David Adjaye were unveiled during the Celebration of Human Fraternity at a New York City public library on 20 September 2019.

In a statement, Adjaye declared that the Abrahamic Family House will be “open to the world.” He expressed hope that it will serve as a space for people across society to “learn and engage in a mission of peaceful coexistence for generations to come.”

“As an architect, I want to create a building that starts to dissolve the notion of hierarchical difference — it should represent universality and totality — something higher that enhances the richness of human life,” Adjaye said.

“We hope we have set out a plan for a beautiful and thought-provoking space that celebrates the three faiths and stimulates dialogue and understanding at a critical time for the world.”

According to Reuters, the synagogue that will be built as part of the interfaith complex will be the first public Jewish house of worship in the UAE even though a small congregation of Jews already meets at a house for worship in Abu Dhabi.

According to a news release,⁵ Adjaye’s contemporary design was chosen through a “rigorous process” that included input from architects of diverse backgrounds and faiths.

But what was “particularly striking” about Adjaye’s design was how it incorporated separate worship spaces for each religion as well as space for an informal gathering, the release explains. At each house of worship, visitors will have the ability to observe services, listen to scripture and experience religious rituals.

The UAE has taken steps in recent years to promote religious freedom and tolerance. But the leadership has also been criticized for jailing activists and punishing political dissent.

In November 2018, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE,

⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2019/09/23/higher-committee-of-human-fraternity-unveils-design-for-the-abrahamic-family-house/>

⁵ <https://www.prnewswire.com/ae/news-releases/as-part-of-global-initiative-to-promote-peace-higher-committee-of-human-fraternity-unveils-design-for-the-abrahamic-family-house-855818042.html>

Armed Forces Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, met with a group of conservative American evangelical leaders in Abu Dhabi a few days before the delegation met with the crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

“The UAE is aggressively working to combat extremism in the Middle East and beyond. Their leadership is encouraging,” Tony Perkins, now chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, said after the visit.

“They have an appreciation for religious freedom that is rare in this region,” Perkins, who’s also president of the Family Research Council, added. “Under the crown prince’s leadership, the UAE is a more tolerant nation, where Christians are allowed to worship freely. I saw firsthand how this freedom of worship is boosting the economy and security of the nation.”⁶

‘Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the United Arab Emirates’

The new book celebrating the UAE’s diversity was launched last year (2019) entitled ‘Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the United Arab Emirates’,

In a Foreword to the book, Sheikh Nahyan says that, “Because we live so harmoniously together in the United Arab Emirates, we may suspect that our various religions might all value tolerance. This anthology serves the essential purpose of converting our vague suspicion into fact. That wonderful fact of tolerance deserves the celebration accorded by this splendid book. To ensure that the celebration never ends, we must communicate and protect the fact by always acting in the spirit of the fact. Without our active attention, tolerance can swiftly vanish. Let the essays in this book inspire tolerance in perpetuity.”

Edited by the Reverend Canon Andrew Thompson, Vicar of St. Andrew’s Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi, ‘Celebrating Tolerance’ is a compendium of the experiences of people from ten various faiths who coexist peacefully in the country. Many are of groups that first arrived in the UAE in the 1960s and 1970s as the country embarked on its programme of rapid development.

Explaining the book, Reverend Thompson, who has also authored ‘Jesus of Arabia’ and ‘Christianity in the UAE’, said that “The UAE has been home to people from diverse faiths. The book aims at celebrating this diversity and building greater understanding amongst communities on different rituals and customs.”⁷

⁶ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/abrahamic-family-house-church-mosque-synagogue-share-new-complex-uae.html>

⁷ <https://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/new-book-on-celebrating-tolerance-in-the-uae-launched-2019-02-04-1.679084>



H.E. Dr Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of Hedayah (International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism) and Member of the UAE Federal National Council, Antonio López-Istúriz White MEP, President of the EU-UAE Friendship Group, EPP Secretary-General and H.E. Mohamed Abushahab, UAE Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union



Rabbi Avi Tavil, Director of the European Jewish Community Center and H.E. Mohamed Abushahab, UAE Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU



H.E. Dr Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of Hedayah (International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism) and Member of the UAE Federal National Council



Fr. Michael O'Sullivan, Representative of the Apostolic Vicar: Bishop Paul Hinder OFM, Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia, Abu Dhabi



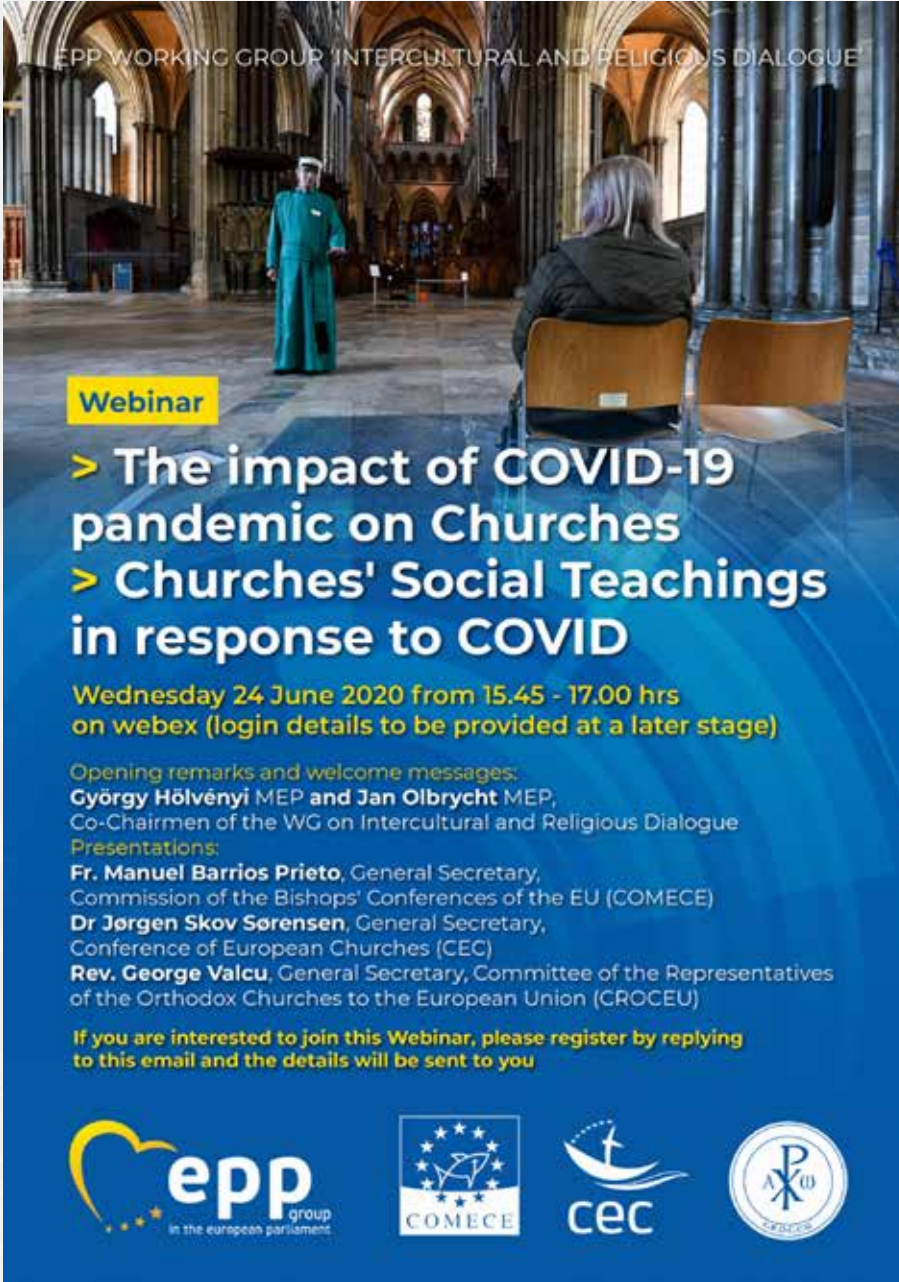
Rev. Canon Andrew Thompson, Chaplain of St Andrew's Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi



Jean Candiote, Contributor, "Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the UAE" Book



Ross Kriel, President of the Jewish Community of the Emirates (JCE)



EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'

Webinar


> The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Churches
> Churches' Social Teachings in response to COVID

Wednesday 24 June 2020 from 15.45 - 17.00 hrs on webex (login details to be provided at a later stage)

Opening remarks and welcome messages:
György Hölvényi MEP and Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairmen of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Presentations:
Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)
Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary, Conference of European Churches (CEC)
Rev. George Valcu, General Secretary, Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union (CROCEU)

If you are interested to join this Webinar, please register by replying to this email and the details will be sent to you



EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'

WEBINAR

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHURCHES CHURCHES' SOCIAL TEACHINGS IN RESPONSE TO COVID

Wednesday, 24 June 2020
via WebEx

PROGRAMME

15:45-15:55 OPENING REMARKS AND WELCOME MESSAGES

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

15:55-16:30 PRESENTATIONS

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

Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary, Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Rev. George Valcu, General Secretary, Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union (CROCEU)

16:30-17:00 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

SUMMARY

Members of the EPP Group gathered remotely to learn more about the examples of the responsibility of religious communities at the time of the epidemic, mobilizing serious human and institutional resources throughout Europe and helping those in need.

Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, Secretary General of CEC, stated that the epidemic put a huge test on credit based on the living community, and the churches managed to convey hope and active assistance to those in need.

An important experience of the epidemic is that the protection of human life must always precede economic considerations, according to Father Manuel Barrios Prieto, Secretary General of COMECE.

For Rev. George Valcu, General Secretary of CROCEU, the impact of the pandemic is an important denominator to remove obstacles to the exercise of credit in Europe in parallel with the gradual resumption of economic life.



Co-Chair **György Hölvényi MEP** opened the webinar by introducing the topic and presenting the three speakers. He stated that the pandemic has affected the church in various ways: with many churches offered life stream during these times by shifting religious services from in person to online but also many interreligious dialogue initiatives have taken place. The second part of the webinar focused on the social teachings of the churches concerning Covid19, the influence of the social dimension of the church and the EU. Mr Hölvényi stressed the importance of human values over possible economic hardships, and that after the Covid19 pandemic people will be looking for credibility to find new solutions. The EU representatives should be ready to take these challenges seriously in order to offer credible solutions for the people.



Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, Secretary General of COMECE, opened the discussion by saying “from the pandemic we have discovered a unity as human beings. We belong to the same human family and we have discovered this by touching the vulnerability.” The Pope in a message stated that “we are in the same boat as was Jesus with his disciples. We felt the loneliness and the darkness upon humanity, we have experienced this as we have felt in danger, we have discovered the sense of vocation/mission.” A nurse which was interviewed was asked why she is going to work and responded, “it’s my duty to go and I am not afraid to do so”. This challenge has been enlightening for people, the importance of humble words is what we discovered for example from certain jobs such as

cashiers. The lockdown for some people has been useful to renew themselves and to learn new things: to be with their children during these times has been an opportunity through spirituality through caring for friends and learning to do new things. People also learned that human life is more important than the economy. The closure of churches was a special experience: it was a purifying experience in the sense that we have had the opportunity to celebrate and worship differently. The closure has made people think of freedom of religion and the importance of church celebrations. Concluding, Fr. Barrios mentioned a tweet of a friend who wrote: “Covid19 is not enough to change us. To change you need a miracle, conversion is the work of God. We don’t change from bad situations”. There can be an occasion for change. We should take what we experienced as an opportunity to change and this depends on us and God. Concerning Europe, Fr. Barrios mentioned the idea that we are in the same boat. It is a moment of solidarity and unity and not one country can be responsible exclusively for the pandemic. It is a great moment for the EU to think of the long term goals such as the new green deal, the new generations who are our future.



Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, Secretary General of CEC, gave a PowerPoint presentation. He mentioned that he had knowledge of the circumstances during the pandemic of the 114 churches he represents. He noted that it is too early to have knowledge of the long term results of Covid19; however, the short-term impact differs. The immediate impact has been on the community, fellowship and assembly within churches. Moreover, there has been a huge discussion about the holy communion (the way it should or should not be given). He continued by saying that “at the heart of the Christian community lies fellowship, and social distancing is incompatible with fellowship. Prayer as a sign of hope and fellowship, is a reminder of our vulnerability and perishability. Every time we use the word hope it is used in the sense of a prayer. We are dependent on our Creator. Our tradition of prayer reminds us who we are and that we are created and not the Creator. We are a worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement. He believes this fellowship will not be broken and it will be reinforced. He was of the opinion that the lack of immediate physical fellowship strengthened our faith which unites us through prayer (especially at the given time for the marginalized, vulnerable, the decision makers, the scientists and the frontline workers). Dr. Sørensen, also illustrated some of the documented Church responses during Covid19 which can be viewed on the CEC website.⁸

⁸ <https://www.cceceurope.org/church-response-to-covid-19/>



Rev. George Valcu, Secretary General of CROCEU: The Reverend underlined that the most obvious consequence of the pandemic was that the faithful could not go to church, especially at very important times such as for Easter and Pentecost. He made a point that the Orthodox are very liturgical and the church recreates and celebrates by partaking in the Eucharist where the believers smell eat and touch, and these could not be done. The Reverend mentioned that there were a few countries which largely refrained from imposing restraints on religious worship such as the Netherlands and Bulgaria. He commented that it is said that the Orthodox are purely liturgical and fail to expand on this matter under the given circumstances. Albeit, in Romania, the

Orthodox church gave 500 million LEU for the vulnerable, in terms of food, medication supplies etc. Reverend Valcu reflected on thoughts and questions on the aftermath of the pandemic crisis which has caused a relaunch of discussions concerning state-church relations, with many expressing a serious concern of the discriminatory measures taken by some countries. He stated freedom of religion should not be mixed with going to the cinema or for a haircut. Moreover, the Reverend continued by asking how the States decided which activities are permitted and which are not, and when does the State decide that going to church is essential. "How is it justifiable for the reopening of shops by the state under specific measures and it is not allowed going to church?" These questions should not be dismissed, noted Rev. Valcu and mentioned that in Germany and France the total ban on religious worship was illegal. The response of the Orthodox Church has been the responsibility to protect the most fragile and vulnerable. He further noted: "As we are sailing past the worse point, the need becomes obvious to look back in what we can do to deal with this virus. We need to use what we found out to arrive at the best balance by limiting the harm of the virus and the harm of the containment. The value of human life is of utmost importance, but many lives were lost because the health system collapsed." Finally, the Reverend pointed out the pressing need for the true knowledge that people need for the best way forward in the respective circumstances, while fake news prove totally counter-productive and capitalize on the constant changing of the official narrative on the fight against the virus.



Former Vice-President Mairead McGuinness, responsible for article 17 of the TEU, commented that regular attendance of services has been mostly impacted, although technology has offered mostly positive solutions. She continued saying that the negative impacts of Covid19 have brought the positive in which churches are reopening with the sense of community, the social aspect where the vulnerable are been taken care of. She continued "Old people in nursing homes should be looked at more as sometimes

these homes are not the best choice for them. The pandemic can help us rethink certain issues: the rights of the children are important; the crisis can teach us and we should learn from it and not go back to the way we were and leave some of the negative past behind."

Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto commented that many interesting points have been made and that it is important to see these times as an opportunity (individually but also collectively). He mentioned that churches have used streaming services for celebrations, and that spiritual life should adapt to the occasion. Conclusively, Father Prieto questioned if celebration without social meeting is valid for the church life. He underlined that the main point is to try and see what the pandemic has taught us to make the best use of it.

Dr. Sørensen mentioned that the social work done by the churches is an important part of the response to the crisis. The social response is paramount. Churches have not been able to respond in the way they wanted to. Finally, he said that the Church-State relations are an important point raised "but that we do not always have the answers. This varies from country to country, and it is an important discussion to follow in the future."

Rev. George Valcu said that digital means are overstated, as they are not the same as being together. A certain part of Christian traditions cannot be replaced by digital technologies although their value is recognized.




Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP concluded that nothing will be 100% the same after the pandemic and that we are not yet aware of what will stay after the crisis in public, political and religious life. Mr. Olbrycht remarked that 'as a Catholic' his church gave the opportunity to partake through media and pointed out that it's not just watching the ceremony but its participating through media. He continued, "this is a big lesson to learn how to participate in different times. Faith in public life gives us courage, hope is important. This has been a test and after the test we can change."

Mr György Hölvényi MEP ended the webinar discussions by thanking all the participants and the speakers and said:

The main question to take away is: How can we keep these values after the normalization of life?

EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'



Webinar

Fighting the effects of COVID in the Developing World


The role of Religious communities

**Wednesday 9 September 2020 from 15.00 - 16.15 hrs
on webex (login details to be provided at a later stage)**

Opening remarks and welcome messages:
György Hölvényi MEP and Jan Olbrycht MEP,
Co-Chairmen of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Presentations:
His Excellency **Archbishop Anthony Muheira**, Nyeri Archdiocese, Kenya
His Excellency **Bishop Alfred Agyenta**,
Roman Catholic Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga, Ghana

If you are interested to join this Webinar, please register by replying
to this email and the details will be sent to you



epp
group
in the european parliament

EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'

WEBINAR

FIGHTING THE EFFECTS OF COVID IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Wednesday 9 September 2020
via WebEx

PROGRAMME

15:00-15:10 OPENING REMARKS AND WELCOME MESSAGES

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

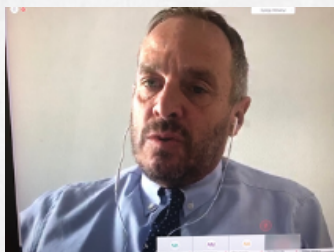
15:10-15:45 PRESENTATIONS

His Excellency Archbishop Anthony Muheira, Nyeri Archdiocese, Kenya

His Excellency Bishop Alfred Agyenta, Roman Catholic Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga, Ghana

15:45-16:15 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

SUMMARY



MEP György Hölvényi, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious dialogue introduces the **Co-Chair MEP Jan Olbrycht** and the speakers **H.E. Bishop Alfred Agyenta**, from Ghana and **H.E. Archbishop Anthony Muheira** from Kenya. He begins the discussion by stating that: "Civil society's involvement in the current dialogue around the future of EU-Africa relations is fundamental. Churches in Africa are the most active and influential actors in the civil society. Therefore, the EU must strive to engage with them. If Africa is left alone in this struggle, the grave situation of the African people may not be managed any longer; this phenomenon will directly affect Europe. Without understanding the local and regional approach, Europe will hardly be able to provide any effective assistance to African countries. Considering the overall situation in Africa, the Catholic Church and other religious communities are playing an essential role in addressing the COVID-crisis, providing basic social services and assistance to people in need".



H.E. Archbishop Anthony Muheira from Kenya: informs that the outbreak of Covid in China and later in Europe was seen as something very distant in Africa. When the numbers grew immensely in Italy, Africa had finally awakened. Lock downs were enforced in Africa and so the ban of gatherings and of public worship. A mix of uncertainty, confusion, and grief was evident during this time. However, faith communities rose to the occasion, to offer help.

The lockdown caused many economic problems especially in the sense of the lack of financial power and cash flow. By May 2020, a lot of businesses were in danger and many employees were laid off. 1.7 million Kenyans lost their jobs due to COVID and the closing of schools left 150,000 teachers without salary.

The economic grievances brought a shortage of food to many families but also psychological problems such as stress and suicidal tendencies.

The effect on young people from being at home all day saw an increase in drug trafficking, domestic and gender violence.

COVID-19 has led many people to seek divine intervention in many ways of prayer, in the need of a message of hope and of divine providence. It is here that the faith communities come in to give a meaning to the crisis.

The role of Churches and faith communities during times of distress and hopelessness gave a message of hope to the people that can only be understood within an atmosphere of transcendence and that God still cares for us. The response to the crisis was first at the level of faith, to maintain the connection with God, and to maintain God's presence through actions of solidarity and charity. Because people were restricted to staying home, the goal was to bring the message of Christ and hope to their own home. This was done through media channels, such as TV coverage of Sunday Masses which continue until today. Use of Radio FM stations to convey messages in over 10 Catholic and 10 secular radios every Sunday, but also live streaming on Facebook and YouTube.

The setting up of the Interfaith Council with the support of the government will help to regulate the resumption of public worship. The Council initiates interfaith dialogue and unity. Furthermore, an Apostolic team was created in response to Covid-19 which sends out on WhatsApp a three minute message which reaches 100.000 people but also a weekly meeting with the bishop on Zoom.

Social media have been utilized to address the various current issues including civic education on COVID-19. Outreach and Bishops have meetings with the youth through Zoom with weekly messages and Catechesis through WhatsApp. Along with the reactivation of Counselling and an accompanying program for married couples.

The Hope4U Initiative (to "feed a needy family" community) Fund has raised 320,000 Euros and helped 7,000 families. Moreover, the Good Shepherd Call Center, which is available 24/7 has assisted over 800 people with volunteers who offer help for people enduring grief but also suicidal thoughts. Lastly, youth sports and competitions have been organised to help the young stay active but also online classes and skill lessons have begun as well as communication hubs for the youth to reconnect with God.

The response in a nutshell of the faith community is to give an opportunity to people to let them speak from their heart but also to hear what God is saying to them in times of crisis and helps them find the meaning of such a crisis."



H.E. Bishop Alfred Agyenta, from Ghana: reports that the effects of Covid-19 in Ghana have had a devastating effect in the country, especially in the following four areas.

1) 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 are limited, especially in the area of Personal Protective Equipment for the health workers and other frontline workers.

2) THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC SECTOR

From March to September 2020, 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, companies and marketplaces.

There have also been reported cases of stigmatization and discrimination suffered by victims of Covid-19 where people who recovered from the disease have had trouble of reintegrating into society.

3) THE RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

The pandemic has destabilized most religious communities in Ghana, a very religious country, with the imposition of restrictions on social gathering and public worship. The inability to gather and pray puts a heavy burden on the population to fight the disease and its disastrous effects. These effects include psychological and spiritual trauma of not being able to be close to their beloved ones affected by the disease as well as not being able to hold decent funeral and burial ceremonies for those relatives who have passed away.

The ban on public worship and social gatherings also meant the inability for most religious communities to mobilize resources in the form of donations for charity and support to the poor and vulnerable.

4) THE EDUCATION SECTOR

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

With the lockdown and the subsequent closure of all educational institutions in the country, many children have lost their learning opportunities and many not being able to afford online teaching and learning facilities. The closure of the schools include negative effects such as cases of teenage pregnancy and early marriages. There was also a noticeable rise in domestic violence.

It should be noted that religious communities, especially in developing countries, remain a 'beacon of hope' for the people especially in times of disaster. In Ghana the response of the religious communities has been threefold, namely spiritual, humanitarian and advocacy.

a) The spiritual contribution of religious communities

Religious communities play the most important role concerning spiritual contribution. With their spiritual resources, religious communities can make a difference in the lives of people who are under anxiety and fear.

These contributions are in the sense of prayers to God for deliverance and protection of the population. These prayers were also organised with other religious communities through an interreligious collaboration to pray for an end to the pandemic in line with the universal

Church invitation of Pope Francis to say special prayers through the recitation of the rosary. Religious communities also 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. In addition, religious communities made use of radio, television and other social media channels to reach out to the public.

b) The humanitarian contribution of religious communities

Religious communities offered help in fighting the humanitarian crisis caused by Covid-19 by contributing and setting up trust funds for the victims.

Furthermore, religious communities gave equipment to the hospitals and clinics for the protection of all health workers and visitors. 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 by distributing considerable amount of food items to the poor, tackling problems of unemployment through programmes of entrepreneurial skills-training and raising awareness among the population about the dangers of the disease and the need to strictly observe the safety protocols.

In the Education Sector, with the gradual reopening of schools throughout the country, and in order to supplement Government effort, some religious communities provided personal protective equipment for the use of teachers and students in their schools. An effort has also been made in relation to those who left school after their closing to return them back to education.

c) The advocacy role of religious communities

Religious communities have made considerable contributions alongside the Government towards the alleviation of the suffering of the people by ensuring fairness, transparency and accountability in the utilization of the resources against the virus. In addition to warning the Government against political and civil activities that can risk the spread of the disease. The Bishop stressed that 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 but also to educate the people about gravity of the and how to follow the safety protocols.

The two statements by the distinguished guests were followed by some questions and remarks.

Mr Hölvényi asked about the importance of education and the difficulty of the school system. "What influence does the religious community have within the specific field? Did the schools close? How did they manage?" Mr Hölvény raised the importance to make known the huge work that is being done in Africa and that the missions need to be known.



Ms Michaela Šojdrová MEP mentioned that it is not possible to imagine the difficulties faced in Africa and that it is difficult to understand the exact work the church does there. It is also important to know how the European Parliament can help in Africa.

Ms Marcela Szymanski mentioned that in many countries the government takes advantage of the COVID crisis to reduce the rights of the faithful and asked if in Africa there is a good relationship with the government.



H.E. Archbishop Alain Paul Lebeaupin, Apostolic Nuncio to the EU stated that we have to learn the way the religious communities act and contribute during the period of Covid-19. It is of interest to hear from the people in Africa being involved and participating in helping people. The Archbishop pointed out that it has not been easy for the church in Europe to play a close role to the people because of the limitations. Thus, it is of interest to learn from Africa how the church has been dealing with the situation differently.

H.E. Muheira responded that Africa has a lot to teach, and one of these, is the the sense of being a community. The welfare care in Africa brings the community together and Covid19 has broken the sense of community by making it difficult to provide assistance.

In relation to the question concerning education, H.E Muheira responded that in Kenya all schools were closed for 8 months and they will reopen in January which is a very long time. The to this was an online education initiative through WhatsApp. In terms concerning the question of what the EP and the European community can do to help, H.E. Muheira answered that they should support the youth initiatives by giving new opportunities. Finally, concerning the question about the relations with the government, H.E responded that there has been a close relationship, in terms of mapping the way out of the crisis. However, there is concern about the funds and resources being allocated appropriately in responding to Covid19. Thus, the biggest threat being the possible social corruption these funds bring.



Rev. Sören Lenz mentioned that H.E. Archbishop Muheira spoke about an Interfaith Council born during this crisis and asked: "What faith traditions were participating, are there common activities in humanitarian, spiritual and advocacy activities?"

H.E. Archbishop Muheira replied by saying that he was requested to be the Chair of the National Interfaith Council which is made up by all the faith communities: Protestants, Evangelicals, Muslims of Shia and Sunni, Hindu council, and some African indigenous. The main issue was how to facilitate the safe reopening of places of worship. Also how to use the places of worship to educate about Covid19 and how to comply with the safety rules. The second issue that was discussed was the organisation of a national prayer meeting in a crisis time. The third issue involved national issues, and possible solutions for improvement of the economy post-Covid19 by participating in forums. Lastly, his H.E. mentioned that the Council consists of 16 members and has been a great success.

Mr Hölvényi asked about the percentage of the population in Kenya that the Interfaith Council reaches.

H.E. Archbishop Muheira responded from the religious leaders in terms of communication they reach over 70% of the population.

H.E. Bishop Alfred Agyenta remarks that in relation to the question concerning the collaboration between the EU and the African religious communities: That People in Ghana trust religious communities concerning social intervention during the crisis and that the EU can trust the religious communities as a credible partner to ensure the help given will reach the people. H.E also stresses the importance of education and the lack of classrooms in Ghana. Lastly, he responds that religious communities have a good relationship with the government and the worship places are one the safest areas because the public adhere to the safety protocols.



MEP Olbrycht, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, concludes that Europe has a lot to learn from the church community in Africa in the way they approached the Covid19 crisis in the sense that both speakers have noted the importance of spiritual dimension and the community sense. The outside dangers such as Covid-19 can have either the effect of making the community stronger and more integrated or the opposite by destroying it, especially if there is not the spiritual element. Lastly, he mentions that the holistic approach, including the sense of community, transparency and education, is among the most relevant issues in this regard.



XX INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: Role of the Catholic Church in the Process of European Integration

“CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR EUROPE”

9 - 10 October

Krakow, Poland

www.kosciol-europa.org.pl

Honorary Chairman of the Organizing Committee:

HE Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz

ORGANIZERS:

Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow

Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Robert Schuman Foundation

IN CO-OPERATION WITH:

European People's Party (Christian Democrats)

EPP Group in the European Parliament

Polish Delegation in the EPP in the EP

Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union COMECE

And Publishing House „Wokół Nas” in Gliwice

SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION:

English, German, Polish

Honorary Patronage

Prof. Jacek Majchrowski

Mayor of Krakow

FRIDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2020

14.30 – 15.00 REGISTRATION

15.00 – 15.30 WELCOME:

Card. Stanisław Dziwisz, Honorary Chairman of the Organizing Committee

Prof. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of Krakow

Message from HE Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop Metropolitan of Luxembourg, President of COMECE

15.30 – 17.00 I PANEL SESSION

CHURCHES IN THE FACE OF PANDEMIC (COVID-19)

DISCUSSION:

Bp Janusz Stepnowski PhD, Bishop of Łomża, Representative of Polish Bishops' Conference in COMECE (tbc)

Jørgen Skov Sørensen PhD, Secretary General of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) (tbc)

Rev. George Valcu, Secretary General of the Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union (CROCEU) (tbc)

MODERATION:

Jan Olbrycht PhD, Member of the European Parliament

18.00 Holy Mass, Saints Peter and Paul Church, 54 Grodzka street

19.00 Ceremony of the presenting **Prof. Rocco Buttiglione** with the Bp Tadeusz Pieronek's Award – "IN VERITATE" for outstanding achievements in combining Christian and European values

Laudation: **Prof. Hanna Suchocka**

Dinner at the invitation of Prof. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of Krakow, Gallery of the 19-century Polish Art in Sukiennice (The Cloth Hall)

SATURDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2020

09.30 – 10.00 REGISTRATION

10.00-11.30 II PANEL SESSION

EUROPA IN THE FACE OF PANDEMIC (COVID-19)

DISCUSSION:

Lieutenant General Sławomir Wojciechowski PhD, Commander of the Multinational Corps Northeast (tbc)

Peter Liese MD, Member of the European Parliament (tbc)

Ewa Kopacz, Vice-President of the European Parliament, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland (tbc)

MODERATION:

Prof. Katarzyna Pisarska, Lecturer at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics

12.00-14.00 Special Session on the 100th Anniversary of Saint John Paul II's Birth

JOHN PAUL II ON EUROPE

UNION OF EUROPE – UNION OF SPIRIT

DISCUSSION:

Valentina Alazraki, Journalist, correspondent of TV Noticiero (tbc)

Prof. Rocco Buttiglione, Lecturer at the Instituto de Filosofía Edith Stein-Academia Internacional de Filosofía in Granada

Hans-Gert Poettering PhD, Plenipotentiary of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for European matters (tbc)

Abp prof. Grzegorz Ryś, Archbishop Metropolitan of Łódź

Prof. Miloš Lichner, SJ, President of the European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT), Vice-Rector of the Trnava University (tbc)

MODERATION:

Rev. Kazimierz Sowa, Journalist and publicist

14.00 – 14.15 SUMMARY:

Msgr. prof. Robert Tyrąła, Rector of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow

14.15 LUNCH

SUMMARY

On 9th and 10th October 2020, the 20th International Conference on the “Role of the Catholic Church in the Process of European Integration” took place in Krakow. The event was organized by the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Robert Schuman Foundation in Luxembourg and the Publishing House “Around us”. The honorary chairperson of the organizing committee Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz personally opened the deliberations.

The conference was divided in two thematic panel sessions: “Churches in the face of a pandemic” moderated by Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue and “Europe in the face of a pandemic” moderated by Prof. Katarzyna Pisarska, Lecturer at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics. These two sessions were followed by a third, solemn session titled “John Paul II on Europe. Unification of Europe – Union of spirit” to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of St. John Paul II.

The speakers of the first session “Churches in the face of a pandemic” included Bishop Janusz Stepnowski of Lomza (KEP Delegate at COMECE), Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen, Secretary General of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and Fr. George Valcu, Secretary General of the Committee of Representatives of Orthodox Churches to the EU (CROCEU). In the second session, General Mieczysław Bieniek, former deputy NATO Commander, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, President of the Polish People’s Party, Dr Peter Liese, Member of the European Parliament and Ewa Kopacz, Vice-President of the European Parliament, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland discussed the theme of “Europe in the face of a pandemic”.

The third session “John Paul II on Europe. Unification of Europe – Union of the Spirit” had among its speakers Valentina Alazraki, Journalist, TV Noticiero correspondent, Prof. Rocco Buttiglione, lecturer at the Institute of Philosophy of Edith Stein in Granada, Dr. Hans-Gert Poettering, former President of the European Parliament, Archbishop Prof. Grzegorz Ryś, Archbishop – Metropolitan of Łódź and Prof. Miloš Lichner SJ, President of the European Association of Catholic Theologians, Vice-Rector of the University of Trnava.

On October 9, a gala event of the Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek Award “IN VERITATE” took place in the Gallery of Polish Art of the 19th century in Cloth Hall. This year’s winner was Prof. Rocco Buttiglione, and the laudatory speech was delivered by Hanna Suchocka, former Prime Minister and former Polish Ambassador to the Holy See.

The first international conference entitled “The role of the Catholic Church in the process of European integration” was organised in Warsaw in May 1998 by the Catholic News Agency in cooperation with the Delegation of the European Commission. For many years, since 2001, Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek († 2018) a Catholic academic and professor of theology and civil law, acted as the chief organiser of the annual conferences in Krakow.



Jan Olbrycht MEP




Fr. George Valcu, Secretary General of the Committee of Representatives of Orthodox Churches to the EU (CROCEU) and Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen, Secretary General of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)



Card. Stanisław Dziwisz, Honorary Chairman of the Organizing Committee

EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'



Webinar


All Brothers ("Fratelli Tutti"), the new Encyclical of Pope Francis

Wednesday 13 October 2020 from 11.00 - 12.15 hrs on webex (login details to be provided at a later stage)

Opening remarks and welcome messages:
György Hölvényi MEP and Jan Olbrycht MEP,
Co-Chairmen of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Presentation:
Monsignore **Marco Ganci**,
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe

If you are interested to join this Webinar, please register by replying to this email and the details will be sent to you



epp group
in the european parliament

EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'

WEBINAR

ALL BROTHERS ("FRATELLI TUTTI"), THE NEW ENCYCLICAL OF POPE FRANCIS

Tuesday, 13 October
via WebEx

PROGRAMME

11:00-11:05 OPENING REMARKS AND WELCOME MESSAGE BY

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

11:05-11:35 PRESENTATION - KEYNOTE SPEAKER

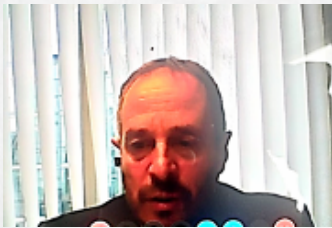
Monsignore Marco Ganci, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe

11:35-11:55 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

11:55-12:00 CONCLUDING REMARKS BY

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

SUMMARY



MEP György Hölvényi, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious dialogue welcomed everyone to the webinar and introduced the topic which is the third encyclical of Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (All brothers) on 'fraternity and social friendship' and gave the floor to the guest speaker Monsignore Marco Ganci.



Monsignore Marco Ganci thanked everyone especially the EPP Group for the invitation to speak about the encyclical. Mons. Ganci mentioned the big context of the encyclical and that 'Fratelli Tutti' is Pope Francis's third encyclical letter in the continuation of *Laudato si'* and the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together signed in Abu Dhabi. The encyclical was signed on 3 October 2020, on the occasion of Pope Francis's visit to the tomb of his namesake, Saint Francis of Assisi. The inspiration for the document was his February 2019 meeting in Abu Dhabi with Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of al-Azhar, during which they signed the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together. Besides Francis of Assisi and Desmond Tutu numerous non-Catholics, including Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi, also inspired the document. Mons. Ganci further gave a summary of the eight chapters that are contained in the encyclical. The 1st Chapter named 'Dark Clouds Over a Closed World' deals with global problems that call for global actions through human fraternity.

The 2nd Chapter named a 'Stranger on the Road' reflects upon the parable of the Good Samaritan; which is the theological core of the encyclical in order to make the right decision to rebuild the world, and take the good Samaritan as an example. The 3rd Chapter named 'Envisaging and Engendering an Open World' proposes a new network of international relations based on love and human fraternity for those who are vulnerable, poor, or suffering. The 4th Chapter named 'A Heart Open to the Whole World' deals with the great migration crisis which needs an immediate solution through the common effort of global governance, and international collaboration which implements long-term planning. In the 5th Chapter named 'A Better Kind of Politics in the Political Sphere', Pope Francis discusses two movements that hinder the ability to see the world as open and having a place for all people: populism and liberalism. Politics has a task to find a solution to counter attacks on fundamental human rights and has to commit to the development of a global community and strategy against poverty. In the 6th Chapter named 'Dialogue

and Friendship in Society' Pope Francis turns to dialogue and its essential role in creating a new culture of fraternity. Where persistent and continuous dialogue might not make headlines but helps to make a better world. In the 7th Chapter named 'Paths of Renewed Encounter' Pope Francis reflects on the value and promotion of peace. He mentions that forgiveness is linked to peace: "we must love everyone, without exception but loving an oppressor means helping him to change and not allowing him to continue oppressing his neighbour". Part of the chapter also focuses on war calling for the total elimination of nuclear arms but also the abolition of death penalty. Lastly, in the 8th Chapter 'Religions at the Service Of Fraternity In Our World' the Pope asserts the essential role that the different religions of the world should play in fostering universal fraternity. The encyclical reflects, in particular, on the role of the Church: it does not "restrict its mission to the private sphere". While not engaging in politics it does not, however, renounce the political dimension of life itself, but pays attention to the common good and concern for integral human development, according to evangelical principals.



MEP György Hölvényi and MEP Olbrycht, Co-Chairs of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue both thanked the speaker by mentioning the importance of the document and that many new discussions can arise from it.

Further, Mr. Olbrycht gave the floor for some questions and answers to Rabbi Avi Tawil, Karlo Ressler MEP and Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto. All thanked the group for organising

this event and mentioned the importance of the document but also of interreligious dialogue. They also expressed a high desire for the continuation of the discussion.

Mr Olbrycht closed the meeting by thanking Monsignore Marco Ganci and expressing his anticipation for future discussions on certain chapters and ideas of the encyclical.




EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE CONFERENCE


The next day in Syria: Humanitarian exceptions to EU sanctions against Syria: why they don't work out?

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

Wednesday 11 November 2020 from 16.30-18.00 hrs

If you are interested to join this Conference, please register
by sending an email to: EPP-Interreligious@ep.europa.eu
and the WebEx login details will be sent to you



EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

CONFERENCE

THE NEXT DAY IN SYRIA:

“HUMANITARIAN EXCEPTIONS TO EU SANCTIONS AGAINST SYRIA: WHY THEY DON'T WORK OUT?”

Wednesday, 11 November 2020

via WebEx

PROGRAMME

16:30-16:40

WELCOMING ADDRESS

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

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS IN SYRIA

16:40-17:00

VIEWS FROM THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Željana Zovko MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Roberto Crespi, Expert for the humanitarian impact of sanctions, in charge of the Syria sanctions, Directorate Financial systems and crisis management, European Commission DG FISMA

17:00-17:30 VIEWS FROM THE CHURCHES AND NGO ACTORS

Thomas Heine-Geldern, Executive President of Aid to the Church in Need International (on behalf of COMECE)

Rev. Riad Jarjour, Protestant Syrian pastor, Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCC), Beirut, Lebanon (on behalf of CEC)

Fr. Moses Alkhassi, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (on behalf of CROCEU)

17:30-17:50 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Moderator: Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary, Conference of European Churches (CEC)

17:50-18:00 CONCLUDING REMARKS

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Fr Aimilianos Bogiannou, Head of the Liaison Office of the Orthodox Church to the EU (on behalf of CROCEU)

SUMMARY

The conference aimed to raise awareness about the impacts of EU sanctions against Syria. Precisely, it intended to identify the main obstacles that humanitarian actors are facing and to look for potential alternative solutions allowing a full implementation of humanitarian exceptions to EU sanctions.

The event was following up on last year's EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue conference on Syria, held in cooperation with the Brussels based Churches organisations of COMECE, CROCEU and CEC.

Experts representing the EU Institutions, Churches and NGO actors discussed about possible solutions ensuring the delivery of aid to all civilians, as requested under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.



György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue:

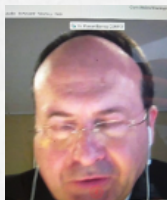
The conference is about the people of Syria, about the humanitarian action of churches and about the international sanctions against Syria that are affecting these actions. It is not about the situation of power. President Assad's brutal repression and the war were devastating the country and its population, causing hundreds of thousands of victims and endless suffering for

people. Despite the efforts of 'smart' sanctions with humanitarian exemptions, their implementation has proven extremely difficult for humanitarian actors. There are unnecessary burdens, and the problem is that the most vulnerable civilians are paying an unacceptably high price for these restrictions. Moreover, among the many negative effects, the Christian youth is prevented from returning to the country and building their future home.

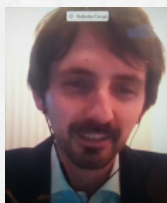


Željana Zovko MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs: The European Union, its member states and all stakeholders urgently need to improve the effectiveness of the sanctions and exemptions mechanism. Humanitarian organizations should be assisted in the preparation of the application for licences and funding. 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. The 2020 May proposal of the EU for a new approach for humanitarian aid in Syria - in the light of the global corona pandemic - is welcome and, hopefully, it brings positive results soon. It is important that the European Commission updates the dimension of its guidance in order to cover not only corona virus related assistance, but all humanitarian sanctions and exemptions.

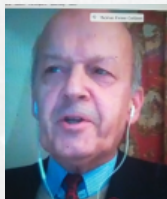


Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE):
Humanitarian exceptions do not work because important sectoral actors (banking, transportation, insurance) fear of being sanctioned. Witnesses living in Syria can help to get a much better understanding of the impacts of sanctions on the people.



Roberto Crespi, Expert, European Commission DG FISMA:
Sanctions must hit the clear targets to minimise the impact on the population. The sanctions' regime envisaged a large system of exceptions and derogations for example for humanitarian reasons and many sets of exemptions exist. The two main recent actions of the European Commission in relation to the sanctions and humanitarian exemptions were firstly to clarify and provide guidance on many complex technical aspects, such as the so-called

Dual-use items. Secondly to initiate dialogue with various actors to provide solutions to the 'chilling effect' issue.



Thomas Heine-Geldern, Executive President of Aid to the Church in Need International (ACN):

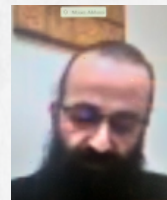
There are many concerns relating to the sanctions, because despite the long list of exceptions there are too many obstacles for them to be practical. The general effect of the sanctions is that the price of imported goods went up and the salaries have been dramatically decreased. Enormous issues remain in Syria on the need for basic food, medical supplies and money transfers.

The practical solution would be to reduce the complexity of international humanitarian help to reduce distress and maximise support for the suffering.



Rev. Riad Jarjour, Protestant Syrian pastor from Beirut:

The sanctions which begun in 2011 have not been accomplishing their goal but making the livelihood more difficult for the Syrian public. They have exacerbated the situation and Syrian people are suffering even more now than during the climax of the civil war. The lifting of sanctions takes time to stop the massive exodus of Christians who are escaping from the terrible conditions.



Fr. Moses Alkhassi, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch:

Churches do not want to discuss the political aspects of the sanctions policy, but the impacts on the lives of people. The sanctions destroy legitimate business and strengthen illegitimate. They have caused the massive fleeing of Syrians to other countries and Europe. The life of Syrian people is at stake, sectoral sanctions have a detrimental impact on the people. Despite of the desperate situation, dialogue between Syrians of different faiths are true signs of hope for the future.



Fr. Aimilianos Bogiannou, Head of the Liaison Office of the Orthodox Church to the EU (CROCEU):

The biggest problem lays in the chilling effect, between the application of the sanctions and the delivery of humanitarian aid. There is need to urge decision makers to simplify processes to deliver aid to suffering people. A kind of simplification of rules is needed, not their removal. It is necessary to respect human dignity and alleviate the suffering.



EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE CONFERENCE

Lebanon after the Beirut seaport explosion

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

With
His Excellency Ralph Tarraf,
Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Lebanon
Dr. Michel Abs,
General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), Beirut

Friday 20 November 2020 from 11.00-12.15 hrs
via Webex videoconference

If you are interested to join this Conference, please register by sending an email to:
EPP-interreligious@ep.europa.eu and the WebEx login details will be sent to you



EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

WEBINAR

LEBANON AFTER THE BEIRUT SEAPORT EXPLOSION

Friday, 20 November 2020
via WebEx

PROGRAMME

11:00-11:10 OPENING REMARKS AND WELCOME MESSAGES BY:

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

11:10-11:45 PRESENTATIONS:

His Excellency Ralph Tarraf, Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Lebanon

Dr. Michel Abs, General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), Beirut

11:45-12:15 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

12:15 END OF THE WEBINAR

SUMMARY

The online event invited as speakers the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Lebanon to provide up-to-date reports on the long-term humanitarian consequences of the seaport explosion as well as the current political and economic landscape of the country



Ambassador Ralph Tarraf, Head of the EU Delegation to Lebanon: Although the different political parties have a confessional base in Lebanon, the struggles between them are more political and cultural rather than religious. The big crisis in Lebanon is not the crisis by the blast but the economic crisis: Lebanon has been overspending in the past decade. What needs to be done for Lebanon is to change its economic and political system.

The blast in August has mainly affected Christian areas in Beirut. The EU has teamed up with other international bodies such as UN and World Bank to rebuild what was lost. Humanitarian help has come through the EU civilian protection mechanism and Lebanese Red Cross focusing mostly on shelter and medical aid.



Dr. Michel Abs, General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), Beirut: Lebanon has been suffering since the civil war. The desperate situation today is the product of a corrupt political system that avoids reforms.

In October 2019 the Lebanese people had enough of the political sectarianism and lack of accountability of politicians and took to the streets in massive protests. However, Covid-19 has changed the circumstances and weakened the uprising. The Beirut blast worsened the situation causing an additional burden on the people, not only material but also psychological.

The relief of construction aid by NGOs, Ministry and intergovernmental organization funds are excessively low for what the people lost. In addition, the depreciation of the Lebanese currency make things harder. Relief organizations of Churches working on the ground can ensure the efficient use of resources and the prevention of corruption.



György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue:

More than three months after Beirut's devastating explosions in early August, the emergency has not yet ended. Things are still precarious, with many needs not yet met.

Lebanon is a key country in the Middle East and not only there. What happens in Lebanon, impacts also on the European Union. Hence, it is the EU's utmost interest to better

understand the situation and provide support. There is a lot to do and any contribution, be it from the EU, other international organisations as well as the many faith-based and civil NGOs, is welcome.

EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'

WEBINAR

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH

H.E. MONS. ARCHBISHOP ALAIN PAUL LEBEAUPIN
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Friday, 20 November 2020
via WebEx

AGENDA

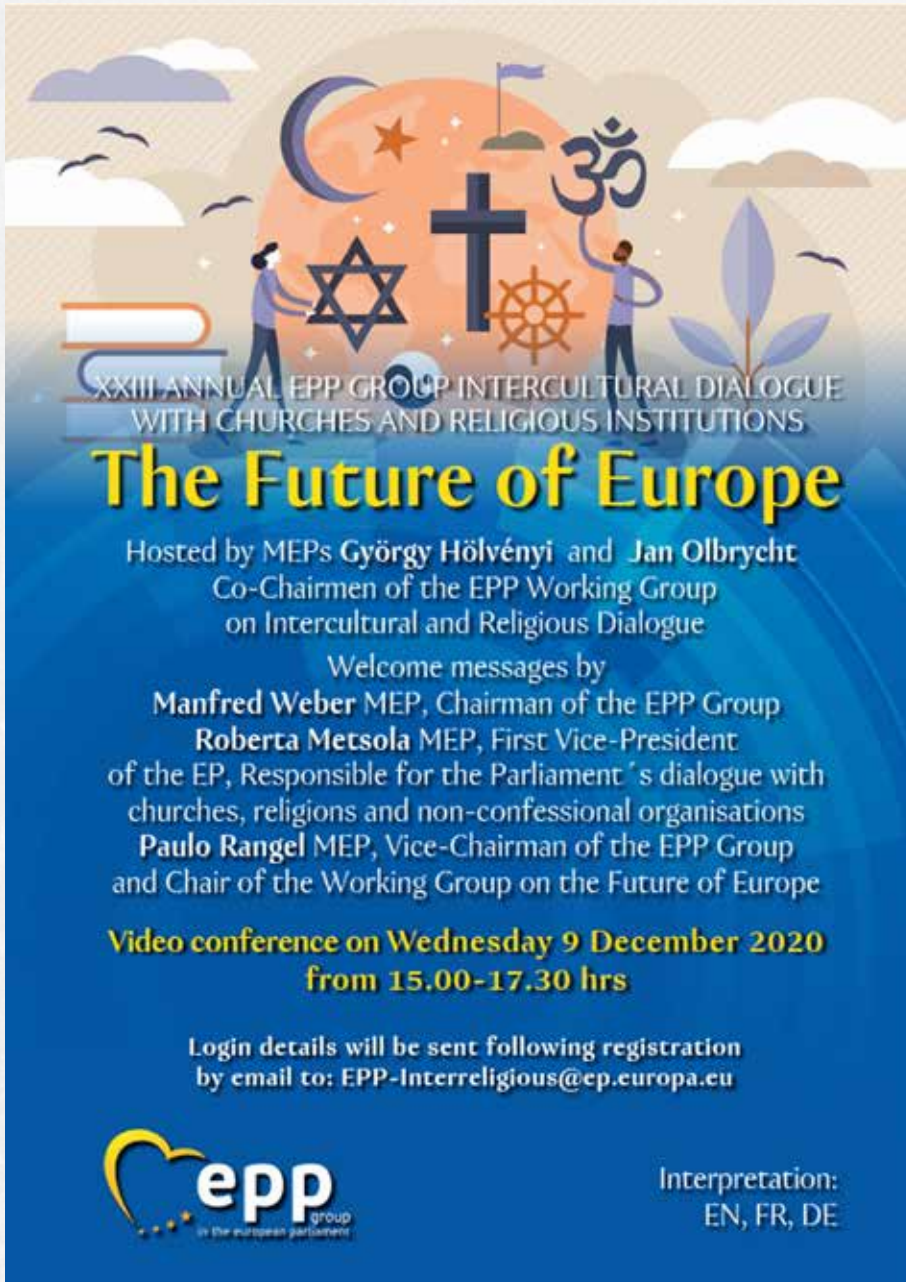
1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Exchange of views with **H.E. Mons. Archbishop Alain Paul Lebeaupin**, Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union about his main achievements and challenges as Apostolic Nuncio accredited to the European Union
3. Questions & Answers

SUMMARY



At the end of his mandate, Archbishop Alain Paul Lebeaupin talked to EPP Group Members about his diplomatic actions, main accomplishments and the key challenges he was facing as the Apostolic Nuncio accredited to the European Union between 2012 and 2020.

The Co-Chairmen MEP Olbrycht and MEP Hölvényi expressed their wholehearted appreciation for the nuncio's tireless engagement with the EU Institutions and, particularly, for strengthening the cooperation with the Working Group 'Intercultural and Religious Dialogue'.



XXIII ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE
WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS


The Future of Europe

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

Welcome messages by
Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group
Roberta Metsola MEP, First Vice-President
of the EP, Responsible for the Parliament's dialogue with
churches, religions and non-confessional organisations
Paulo Rangel MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group
and Chair of the Working Group on the Future of Europe

**Video conference on Wednesday 9 December 2020
from 15.00-17.30 hrs**

Login details will be sent following registration
by email to: EPP-Interreligious@ep.europa.eu



Interpretation:
EN, FR, DE

XXIII ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

"THE FUTURE OF EUROPE"

9 December 2020

video conference

PROGRAMME

15:00 HRS

OPENING SESSION

Jan Olbrycht MEP and **György Hölvényi** MEP Co-Chairmen of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

WELCOME MESSAGES

Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group

Roberta Metsola MEP, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Responsible for the Parliament's dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organisations (Article 17 TFEU)

Paulo Rangel MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group and Chair of the Working Group on the Future of Europe

15:25 HRS

SESSION I: THE POSITION OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CONCERNING EUROPE'S FUTURE

CHAIR

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

INTERVENTIONS

Archbishop Youssef Soueif, Maronite Archbishop of the Maronite Catholic Archeparchy of Tripoli in Lebanon and former Archbishop of the Maronites in Cyprus

Metropolitan Arsenios Kardamakis, Metropolis of Austria and Exarch of Central Europe, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Chief Rabbi Slomó Köves, Unified Israelite Congregation of Hungary (EMIH)

Prof. Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace International

DISCUSSION

16:25 HRS.

SESSION II: WHAT DO CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES THINK OF CITIZENS' AND FAITHFULS' EXPECTATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

CHAIR

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

INTERVENTIONS

Sr. Helen Alford O.P., Member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and vice rector of the University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rome

Bishop Kaisamari Hintikka, Diocese of Espoo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Chief Imam Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi, Scottish Shia Muslim community

DISCUSSION

17:25 HRS.

CLOSING SESSION

Jan Olbrycht MEP and **György Hölvényi MEP** Co-Chairmen of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

17:30 HRS.

END OF CONFERENCE

SUMMARY

The XXIII. Annual EPP Group Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions was held on Wednesday, 9 December 2020 via video conference.

The title of the conference was “The Future of Europe” and it was divided into two sessions:

Session I. focused on “The position of Churches and Religious Communities concerning Europe’s future”. Session II. dealt with the issue “What do Churches and Religious Communities think of citizens’ and faithfuls’ expectations on the future of Europe”.

The event brought politicians and religious representatives together to look at the medium to long-term future of Europe. In the broader institutional context, the conference was an opportunity for EPP Group Members to reflect with Church leaders and religious experts about finding new forms of collaboration among different sections of society and about identifying viable paths helping to strengthen social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in Europe.



Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament:

> Dialogue between politicians and religious communities is essential. The EPP Group supports these activities and is committed to dialogue.

> The Covid-19 crisis has had a great impact on societies, loneliness is growing in Europe. There is a need to rebuild communities and, especially, engage the young generations.

> Europeans have to look at the common ground and identity, the European way of life that needs to be defended and promoted. Managing the times of fundamental changes should not be crisis driven but solution driven. The encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” of Pope Francis provides for a global perspective and can help, because nobody can solve problems alone, hence, people need to work together to find common solutions.



Roberta Metsola MEP, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Responsible for the Parliament’s dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organisations (Article 17 TFEU):

> The question of Europe is present in the political debate. This is a time of combined crisis, Europeans need to tackle extremism and terrorism. Religious leaders and secular scholars can help tackling these issues for the Future of Europe. Europeans saw powerful images of solidarity during the health pandemic, the citizens expect concrete solidarity. Politicians need to reinforce dialogue with European civil society such as the religious institutions which are rooted in European countries.

> European values are intrinsically linked to religious values, Europeans need to take a stance against religious hatred and stand up for Christians persecuted across the globe.



Paulo Rangel MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group and Chair of the Working Group on the Future of Europe:

> Human dignity and human rights must be placed at the center of the debate about the Future of Europe.

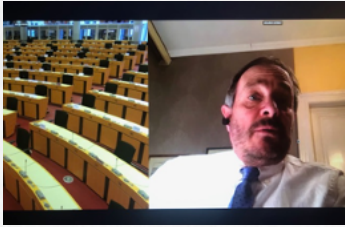
> It is important to accept the role of churches, the role of religion in the public sphere. Christian democrats are in favour of the interaction of church and state, between the political sphere and the religious one. It should not be used to hinder churches from having their public role. Freedom of religion allows and gives the right to religions to be partners in political and social life.



Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue:

> The Annual Dialogue is a special dialogue with churches and institutions. The 2020 EPP Group Dialogue focuses on the subject of ‘The Future of Europe’ which is a big challenge because of the difficult time of post-Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.

> Dialogue must be based on equal treatment of partners and should not only include Church leaders, but also people as members of the Churches. Christian Democrats should be the pioneers of this dialogue.



György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue:

> The pandemic and related challenges have made people open to new messages and ideas for their future. Great opportunities await church leaders and decision-makers to reshape their perspective on Europe and European societies. Europe desperately needs to re-invent itself for the 21st century.

> The Future of Europe cannot be built without the knowledge about and the understanding of spirituality of the past. The future cannot exist without this wisdom, be it the Talmudic or the Christian tradition, and without reflecting on them.

SESSION I. "THE POSITION OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CONCERNING EUROPE'S FUTURE"



Archbishop Youssef Soueif, Maronite Archbishop of the Maronite Catholic Archeparchy of Tripoli in Lebanon and former Archbishop of the Maronites in Cyprus:

> The consequences of the pandemic have taught Europeans how to rethink the way of life, to reinvent personal and social life. The Christian roots are the cultural roots

and values of Europe.

> Both religious and cultural challenges are very important today: migrants and asylum seekers are coming to Europe and they will change the demographic and religious situation. Europeans are called to be reasonably open and balanced. Education is vital, the "other" should not be a source of fear but richness in social life.



Metropolitan Arsenios Kardamakis, Metropolitan of Austria and Exarch of Central Europe, Ecumenical Patriarchate:

> Religion plays an important role in the public and personal sphere, without religion it is impossible to imagine our past, present and future. There are important issues

of identity which have not been resolved. Considering the changes occurring in the world, Europe's role is not an easy one but a central one in terms of creating peace. The EU plays an important role in overcoming the clash of cultures.

> Religious dialogue is of the utmost importance and will be a good response to the challenges of today. The fundamental role of religious institutions is to foster dialogue. The Future of Europe depends also on the capacity to strengthen interreligious dialogue: hence, religious leaders are ready to make this process easier.

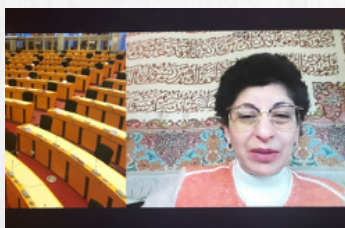


Chief Rabbi Slomó Köves, Unified Israelite Congregation of Hungary (EMIH):

> The holiday of Hannukah connects to the discussion on the Future of Europe in the way that in Jewish history oppression had its physical forms, but also spiritual oppression. Spiritual oppression is less visible but not less

dangerous than physical. Hannukah reminds everyone of the importance of common values and traditions to be taken from the past into the future. It is important to preserve the Jewish traditions on the continent. The wellbeing of European Jews is the wellbeing of all EU citizens.

> Hannukah also means “education”: when speaking about the Future of Europe, Europeans must not forget that the most important tool is education.



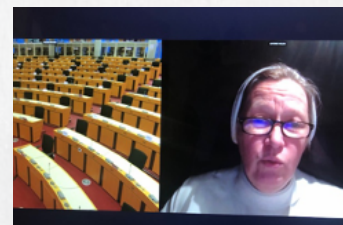
Prof. Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace International:

> Europe has changed its composition; the face of Europe today is not what it was 25 years ago. There are multiple cultural and religious constituents who feel Europe is their land now. There is no way of only a secular framework in

Europe, there is necessity for religious diversity. It is critical to speak of religious sensitivity but also important to consider the coexistence of religious institutions.

> EU policymakers should seek those who work on interreligious issues to collaborate on the religious spectrum. It is essential for EU policymakers to pose the questions to those who foster social cohesion and are willing to work together. They are those who will provide progressive opinions for the Future of Europe. Furthermore, multi-religious collaborative efforts need to be promoted and safeguarded by the EU.

SESSION II. “WHAT DO CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES THINK OF CITIZENS’ AND FAITHFULS’ EXPECTATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE”



Sr. Helen Alford O.P., Member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and vice rector of the University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rome:

> Historical data shows that religious leaders have promoted to a higher level EU unity than those of non-believers. The Future of Europe could be threatened by the loss of this support. It is in the interest of the EU to support

the communities of faith and their role. More recently, the support among Catholics to the EU has been declining; this is worrying as Catholics were the strongest supporters of European integration.

> The relationship between the EU and the believers seems to be under stress: the EU does not connect clearly with the lives of believers. Hence, some actions from the part of the EU and religious leaders could help to foster the relationship, such as the recognition of the beatification of Robert Schuman. The EU needs to emphasize the crucial role of people like Robert Schuman has played in the unity of Europe.

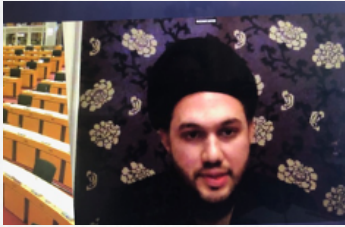


Bishop Kaisamari Hintikka, Diocese of Espoo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland:

> The importance of involving the citizens in the ‘Future of Europe’ needs to be stressed. The Church represents millions of people and there are many expectations in the churches towards the EU. Churches are deeply rooted in the EU Member States. Therefore, they are in a natural position to act as bridges between the people in Europe.

These are times of change and every bridge builder is needed to build the future of Europe that is rooted in solidarity, democracy.

> When people promote human rights and human dignity, solidarity and democracy, then they are promoting Christian values, which are deeply rooted in faith. Not only Christianity plays a role in shaping the future of Europe. Interreligious cooperation has become more and more important in the recent years. Religious communities not only need to condemn acts of religious violence but they need also to offer an alternative and visible ways. Namely, that religious institutions are working against hate and for a joint future. The role of religions in building the Future of Europe is crucial.



Chief Imam Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi, Scottish Shia Muslim community:

> Europeans are more dependent on each other economically and politically than ever before. There is a shared European identity, a huge diversity of cultures that is a strength and not a weakness.

> European values such as dignity, democracy, religious freedom are of utmost importance, but there are also challenges ahead. There seems to be a polarisation such as the rise of anti-Semitism, islamophobia, xenophobia, and the EU needs to tackle this new crisis. To move forward and to integrate there is a need to tackle the issue of use of language that leads to polarisation. Religious communities have stepped up in overcoming the crisis. Thus Europe needs to empower religious communities and groups that promote interreligious coexistence. Education needs to be also given much more attention.

PRESS RELEASES

Fighting the effects of COVID in the Developing World

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

<https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/covid-in-africa-churches-play-special-role-in-crisis>



More help to fight the COVID pandemic in Africa, especially support for local healthcare systems. This is what Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament Jan Olbrycht MEP and György Hölvényi MEP, both Co-Chairmen of the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, called for today.

Olbrycht and Hölvényi hosted a webinar with African church leaders entitled ‘Fighting the effects of COVID in the developing world - the role of religious communities’.

The webinar provided first-hand information on the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic reality and socio-religious practices in Africa. MEPs debated with the Roman Catholic Archbishop Anthony Muheria of the Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya, and the Roman Catholic Bishop Alfred Agyenta of the Diocese of Navrongo–Bolgatanga, Ghana.

“If Africa is left alone in this struggle, the grave situation of the African people may not be managed any longer, a phenomenon which will directly affect Europe”, Hölvényi explained.

Olbrycht highlighted that development aid should allow for a prompt response to the Coronavirus crisis. He also underlined that special attention and financial help have to be dedicated to supporting health systems and caregiving for the elderly.

“Churches and religious communities have a special role to play in supporting African governments and international organisations to respond to the crisis. However, without understanding the local and regional approaches in Africa, Europe will hardly be able to provide any effective assistance to African countries”, Hölvényi concluded.

The EU is currently re-formulating its policies towards Africa. The European Commission, together with the African Union, is working on the new Comprehensive EU-Africa Strategy.

The next day in Syria:

“HUMANITARIAN EXCEPTIONS TO EU SANCTIONS AGAINST SYRIA: WHY THEY DON’T WORK OUT?”

<https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/sanctions-hampering-reconstruction-of-syria>



The EPP Group’s Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue organised a webinar conference today entitled ‘The next day in Syria: humanitarian exceptions to EU sanctions against Syria. Why they don’t work out’.

High-ranking speakers from organisations of the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Churches as well as NGOs active in humanitarian assistance participated in the webinar conference.

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chair of the Working Group who visited Syria in the last parliamentary term, launched the conference by pointing out that international sanctions against Syria are unfortunately hampering reconstruction efforts. Among the many negative results, the Christian youth is being prevented from returning and building their future homes.

“We need to identify solutions by bringing the churches on board in humanitarian cooperation”, said Hölvényi.

“During my fact-finding mission to Syria in early 2018, I was deeply impressed by the testimony and commitment of churches for the people in dire need, to an extent truly unimaginable for us in Europe”, underlined Hölvényi.

“Faith-based organisations are crucial actors in ensuring that effective aid is provided to civilians broken and crippled by war, as is also required under international humanitarian law”, concluded Hölvényi.

Today, as we head towards the end of 2020, the humanitarian needs of people remain immense. Millions of children and young adults require educational support; approximately 15 million people lack access to clean drinking water and around 11.5 million people lack access to adequate healthcare. Furthermore, millions of Syrians require nutritional support.

Lebanon after the Beirut seaport explosion

<https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/prevent-the-collapse-of-lebanon>



“More EU assistance is needed to rebuild Lebanon. Faith-based charities play a crucial role in the relief activities after the devastating Beirut explosion”, said György Hölvényi MEP today at an EPP Group webinar on the situation in Lebanon following the Beirut port explosion on 4 August 2020.

The EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue debated with Ambassador Ralph Tarraf, Head of the EU Delegation to Lebanon, and Michel Abs, the new Secretary-General of the Middle East Council of Churches, on how the EU is helping Lebanon in coping with the complex crisis and how the different Christian communities are attempting to tackle the many problems.

Hölvényi, who is co-chair of the working group, highlighted: “Lebanon was already in an extreme social and economic crisis when the country went through one of the toughest disasters of its history. Right from the morning after the explosion, I got in touch with the local Caritas to explore ways to prompt European assistance. From my previous fact-finding missions to Lebanon, I knew that faith-based actors possess the most significant capacities to react and help in these unprecedented situations. We are glad that some European countries already cooperate with faith-based charities.”

“With today’s event, we wish to raise awareness about the need for ongoing assistance in order to prevent the total social collapse of Lebanon”, concluded Hölvényi.

XXIII ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

“THE FUTURE OF EUROPE”

<https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/future-of-europe-debate-with-religious-communities>



The EPP Group held its 23rd Annual Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions today. The event brought together leading MEPs, with high-ranking representatives from Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities, and academics.

In his opening remarks, Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group, said: “For us, Europe is a union of values. The European way of life protects the freedom of all religions and it sticks in the same way to our Judeo-Christian heritage. The EPP Group is the only political group in the European Parliament which has a longstanding, unique institutional and structured relationship with Churches and religious communities. In the difficult times in which we are living, we believe that dialogue between religious communities is a much-needed tool to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and strengthen the European way of life.”

On behalf of the European Parliament, First Vice-President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola MEP, responsible for the Parliament’s dialogue with Churches, religions and non-confessional organisations, highlighted: “The European Union - all of us - are living through an unprecedented number of combined crises: environmental, economical, geopolitical and social. To that, COVID added a health crisis, while the terrorist attacks in the past weeks have reminded us of the urgency to tackle extremism and counter radicalisation. Religious and secular leaders play a crucial role in tackling this scourge on our society. European values, indeed the European way of life, are intrinsically tied to our religious and cultural heritage and we must continue to promote our values of openness, tolerance and acceptance within our communities.”

Jan Olbrycht MEP, co-Chairman of the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, added: “It is very important for politicians to know how Churches read and interpret the expectations of Europeans towards the future of Europe. We should not focus on the past or its narratives. Instead, we should focus on the future that we can shape through dialogue. Such dialogue must be based on equal treatment of partners and should not only include Church leaders, but also people as members of the Churches. We, as Christian Democrats, should be the pioneers of this dialogue.”

György Hölvényi MEP, also co-Chairman of the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, concluded: “As the COVID pandemic and the resulting complex challenges have made people open to new messages and ideas for their future, great opportunities await Church leaders and decision-makers to reshape their perspective on Europe and our societies. With thousands of years of experience of Churches and religious communities, Europe desperately needs to find itself in the 21st Century. With this year’s meeting, religious and political leaders are showing that they are taking responsibility not only for their own political, religious or ecclesiastical communities, but for the future of society as a whole.”

**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



Nikolaos-Alexandros PHILIPPAS,
Trainee, Intercultural
and Religious Dialogue Unit



Published by: Directorate Outreach
EPP Group in the European Parliament

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

Contributors: Atilla AGÁRDI, Nora KRAMER, Josefina PELÁEZ,
Nikolaos-Alexandros PHILIPPAS, Gábor TÖRÖK

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

Internet: www.eppgroup.eu

E-mail: EPP-Interreligious@europarl.europa.eu

Copyright: EPP Group in the European Parliament

Follow us



**#Ambitious
#EUROPE**