



INTERCULTURAL & RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

However, the numerous difficulties caused by the pandemic the last two years provoked that the EPP Group needed to create alternatives rather than stopping its activity. Intercultural and Religious Dialogue is in its essence a people-to-people activity. Nevertheless, 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. Even so, 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 in 2020 year and this initiative was continued during 2021. 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.

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TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT RELIGION AND FOREIGN POLICY WITH
MRS. MERETE BILDE, SPECIAL ADVISOR, EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

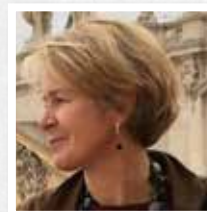
AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Exchange of views with **Mrs. Merete Bilde**, Special Advisor, European External Action Service of the European Union about Religion and Foreign Policy
3. Questions & Answers

BACKGROUND

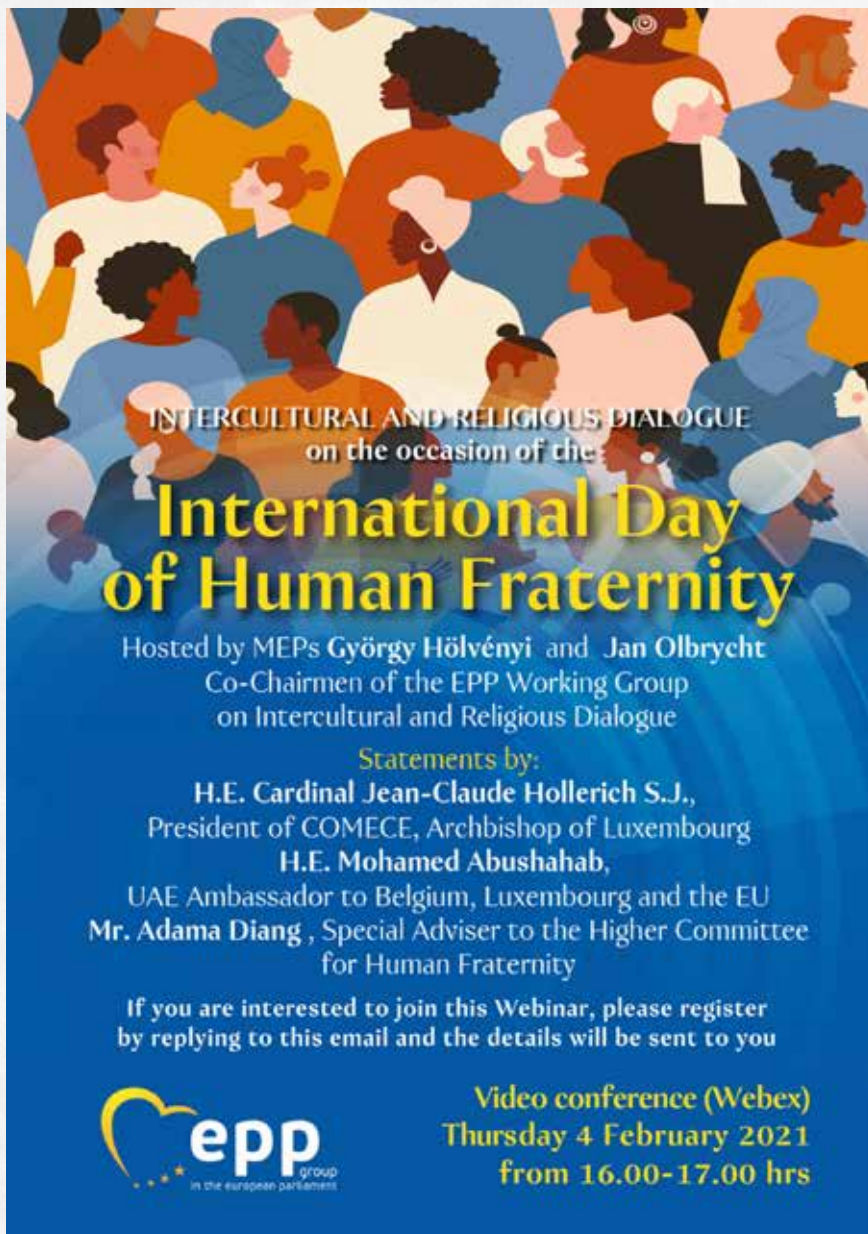
Mrs. Bilde is the driving force behind the European External Action Service's Task Force on Religion and Culture as well as the European External Action Service training course on Religion and Foreign Policy with the aim to develop collective awareness and skill-set to appreciate the role of religion (whether helpful or problematic) and its implication for diplomatic work. **Mrs. Bilde** is one of the two co-founders of the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Foreign Policy in 2015. She wrote a short piece on the Brussels perspective on Religion and Diplomacy in the resulting publication 'Faith Freedom and Foreign Policy – Challenges for the Transatlantic Community'. In this article, entitled: 'Religion and foreign policy: A Brussels perspective' it was explained how religion comes in different shades and forms from a European perspective.

SUMMARY



Mrs. Bilde underlined that when nowadays there is a different level of recognition to religion, in consequence faith plays a role as a driver, identity marker and that of a world view.

The transatlantic policy network was created by the European External Action Service of the European Union about Religion and Foreign Policy (EEAS) which also has a website which contains policy papers such as the foreign policy of the Holy See. With the transatlantic network, an academic advisory body was established in order to create useful publications and policy papers. There is need for policy dialogue including freedom of religion. Finally, the initiative of the former High Representative Mogherini called the EU's International Exchange Platform on Religion & Social Inclusion created an Erasmus on the role of religion in societies by building bridges across countries across the globe starting with Bosnia & Herzegovina.




INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
on the occasion of the

International Day of Human Fraternity

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

Statements by:
H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J.,
President of COMECE, Archbishop of Luxembourg
H.E. Mohamed Abushahab,
UAE Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU
Mr. Adama Diang, Special Adviser to the Higher Committee
for Human Fraternity

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

Video conference (Webex)
Thursday 4 February 2021
from 16.00-17.00 hrs

THURSDAY, 4 FEBRUARY

WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HUMAN FRATERNITY

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Statements by:
 - **H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J.**, President of COMECE, Archbishop of Luxembourg
 - **H.E. Mohamed Abushahab**, UAE Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU
 - **Mr. Adama Diang**, Special Adviser to the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity
3. Exchange of views on the occasion of the International Day of Human Fraternity

BACKGROUND

EPP Group Members and participants commemorated the second 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 the 4th February 2019. The Document found a strong echo worldwide leading the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution on 21 December 2020 declaring the 4 February as the International Day of Human Fraternity. The day is to be observed each year.



SUMMARY



Co-chair **György Hölvényi MEP** highlighted that today's event was organised on the occasion of the International Day of Human Fraternity, after the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi.

Co-chair **Jan Olbrycht MEP** stressed the significance of the last part of the document; it should be used by different actors in public life in their activities, research, analysis etc.



H.E. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J. mentioned that the biggest issue in the past was to think of 'us' and the 'others' because that created exclusion, oppositions and clashes. The document of Abu Dhabi and the encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" tell us that the 'other' is our 'brother' and that in his 'otherness' he belongs to 'our' own identity. The Muslim brothers in Europe should know that we care for them and their religious freedom. Together Muslims, Jews and Christians can commit in politics for peace, justice and ecology and fight against any exclusions or discriminations.

H.E. Mohamed Abushahab mentioned that the UAE are proud to have played a role in establishing with its partners at the UN the International Day of Human Fraternity. The UAE strongly felt to celebrate acceptance, openness, empathy and love towards other human beings and to look beyond of what divides.



Mr. Adama Dieng mentioned that the document on Human Fraternity was recognized by the UN General Assembly on December 22nd, 2020. It served as a basis to establish the 4. February as the World Day of Human Fraternity. The contribution of the UAE to the values of peaceful coexistence by supporting the Human Fraternity award which has been one of the most important initiatives of the Higher Committee, is very significant. The global award encourages those who work for a more inclusive and peaceful world.

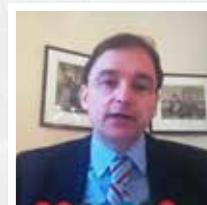
TUESDAY, 9 MARCH

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT "THE STATE OF PLAY OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY AND ITS FUTURE PERSPECTIVES" WITH **PROF. DR. CHRISTIAAN ALTING VON GEUSAU**, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC LEGISLATORS NETWORK (ICLN)

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr. György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr. Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Statement by **Prof. Dr. Christiaan Alting von Geusau**, President and Founder of the International Catholic Legislators Network (ICLN)
3. Debate, Questions & Answers with the participation of **Mr. François-Xavier Bellamy MEP**, Head of the EPP Group French Delegation

BACKGROUND



Prof. Dr. Christiaan Alting von Geusau presides over the International Catholic Legislators Network, created to provide Catholic politicians with continuing training through annual meetings and educational programmes. He teaches lectures and publishes in the areas of law, philosophy and education with a special interest for Christian identity, history and human rights. The International Catholic Legislators Network (ICLN) was founded in 2010 as an independent and non-partisan international initiative to bring together practicing Catholics and other Christians in elected office on a regular basis for faith formation, education and fellowship.



SUMMARY

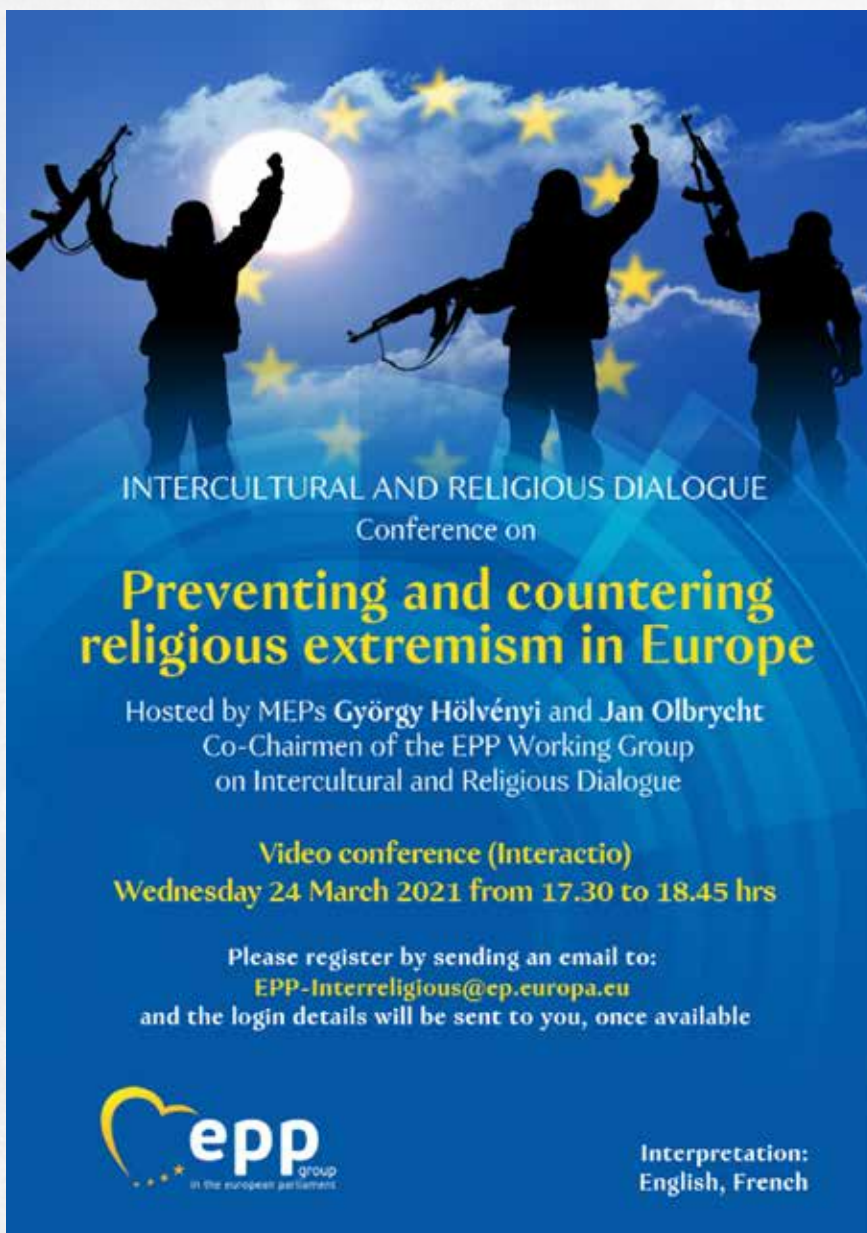
To begin with, the speaker explained how Christian Democracy is intrinsically linked with Europe. Europe is deeply Christian and grounds on the ancient Greek, Jewish and Roman traditions. Later on, he started with a somewhat critical remark regarding the EPP Group position paper on The Future of Christian Democracy. He regretted that the core values of Christian Democrats are only dealt with at page 4. As the foundation of Christian Democracy they should be brought at a better, more prominent place at the beginning of this important position paper.

He further continued saying that Christian Democracy is ineffective in most countries nowadays. He cannot tolerate and understand that for example abortion is legalised by Christian democratic politicians. Nor that religious and conscientious freedom, marriage have succumbed in some governments' views. When speaking about the destiny of Europe, he also claimed that these are times of struggling, and there is a great danger that comes from science.

Furthermore, the speaker addressed the sources of Europe. He reminded that Pope Benedict XVI already had talked about how difficult it is for politicians in the modern world to recognize true justice in law-making, and how he advised the parliamentarians to remember the Christian roots of the European conception of justice and emphasized that nature and reason were the true sources of justice.

About the hope of Europe, he said that fearless leaders with vision and faith are necessary. If Christian Democrats themselves are without faith, Christian Democracy is not viable. It is not necessary to have a faultless faith, but a Christian Democrat should be someone who even by struggling, tries to keep faith and follow Christ.

The idea of the importance of education and culture was brought up, as this field is where Churches are strong: in the past, they always started actions with education, not with politics.




INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Conference on

Preventing and countering religious extremism in Europe

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

Video conference (Interactio)
Wednesday 24 March 2021 from 17.30 to 18.45 hrs

Please register by sending an email to:
EPP-Interreligious@ep.europa.eu
and the login details will be sent to you, once available



Interpretation:
English, French

WEDNESDAY, 24 MARCH

CONFERENCE ON
“PREVENTING AND COUNTERING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM
IN EUROPE”

PROGRAMME

17:30-17:45

WELCOMING ADDRESSES

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

17:45-18:15

EXPERTS' TESTIMONIES

- **Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs**, Chief Rabbi of the Interprovincial Chief Rabbinate, Chairman of the Rabbinical College for the Netherlands
- **Imam Hassan Chalgoumi**, President of the Conference of the Imams of France, Dean of the Drancy Mosque and President of the Association of Muslims of Drancy, France
- **Fr. Xavier Chavane**, Catholic Parish Priest at the "Saint Vincent de Paul" Parish Church in Sartrouville, episcopal delegate for relations with Muslims in the Yvelines Department, Diocese of Versailles, France
- **Fr. Nikodemus Claudius Schnabel OSB**, Director of the Jerusalem Institute of the Görres-Gesellschaft (JIGG) and Delegate of the Pontifical University Sant'Anselmo in Rome for the "Theologisches Studienjahr Jerusalem", former advisor for "Religion and Foreign Policy" in the German Federal Foreign Office

18:15-18:35

DISCUSSION AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

OPENING: **François-Xavier Bellamy MEP**, Head of the EPP Group French Delegation

18:35-18:45

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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

BACKGROUND

On 24 May 2021 the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit hosted a conference under the name “**Preventing and countering religious extremism in Europe**”. The theme of it was focused on not only preventing and battling religious extremism in Europe but at the same time defining what extremism truly means. The conference began with welcoming addresses from **MEP György Hölvényi**, Co Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, **MEP Jan Olbrycht**, Co-Chairman of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue and **MEP Roberta Metsola**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Responsible for the Parliament's dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organisations (Article 17 TFEU).

SUMMARY



Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, started his statement with a question: “*How do we prevent religious extremism?*”, but Rabbi Jacobs said that people should first think about what the definition of ‘religious extremism’ is and who is to determine the definition. Rabbi Jacobs then placed the question if extremism is really linked to religion, given that there are also non-religious extremists. His view on the matter was that linking extremism to religion by definition is far from right. He added that extremism may come from education but not just any education, but education in the family. He made clear that

parents must educate their children on what is wrong and what is right, how to live by the laws of their religion, and how to treat people. The Rabbi added other possible factors leading to extremism. Some Governments or dictators may convince young people that killing people with a different opinion or skin-colour is good for them.

Imam Hassan Chalgoumi stated that unfortunately, the states have been minimising and closing their eyes to religious practices that were radical. He calls this type of radicalism Islamism or Political Islam. In order to prevent extremism and radicalism, it should be started by training Muslims, as intolerance is the enemy. “*Intolerance hits many youngsters who have a poor knowledge of religion.*” A type of training that involves and respects the values of Europe. Another aspect is education. Parents should be educated, firstly, as many radicals start their education at home. Radicals still tend to kill Jewish people in the name of Islamism. However, it has nothing to do with Islam. The next aspect that was mentioned by the Imam was the youth of the digital era. Social media should be there to unite people, not to divide them. There are hundreds of groups and messages proclaiming hate on Facebook and when youngsters could easily believe anything written on social media. The fourth mentioned aspect was the Imam's dream. He said he worked with Imams to battle extremism and they travelled around Europe, spreading their message and showing their belonging to Europe. The Imam finished his speech by welcoming the Abraham Agreement and other peace agreements and positive initiatives.



Fr. Xavier Chavane answered the question regarding whether extremism is good or bad. In his words, Father Xavier himself is an extremist in his own way. “*Just like Jesus, who teaches us that we can give our life to our brothers and have an extreme love.*” That answer shed new light on the term ‘extremism’. He reported about his work and the diversity of people attending church on Sunday from refugees to regular citizens, Christians and non-Christians alike. “*Our world is complex and painful. It is shown by all those refugees coming to Europe in search of hope.*” In this context of religion and

extremism, the question of Islamic fanatics arises. The focus of his speech was also education, security, justice, and solidarity. He spoke of initiatives in France, one of them allowing religious communities to be truly considered as partners for the common good. In conclusion, he said that when Islamic values are aligning with the values of the Republic, then together we can battle extremism and radicalism.

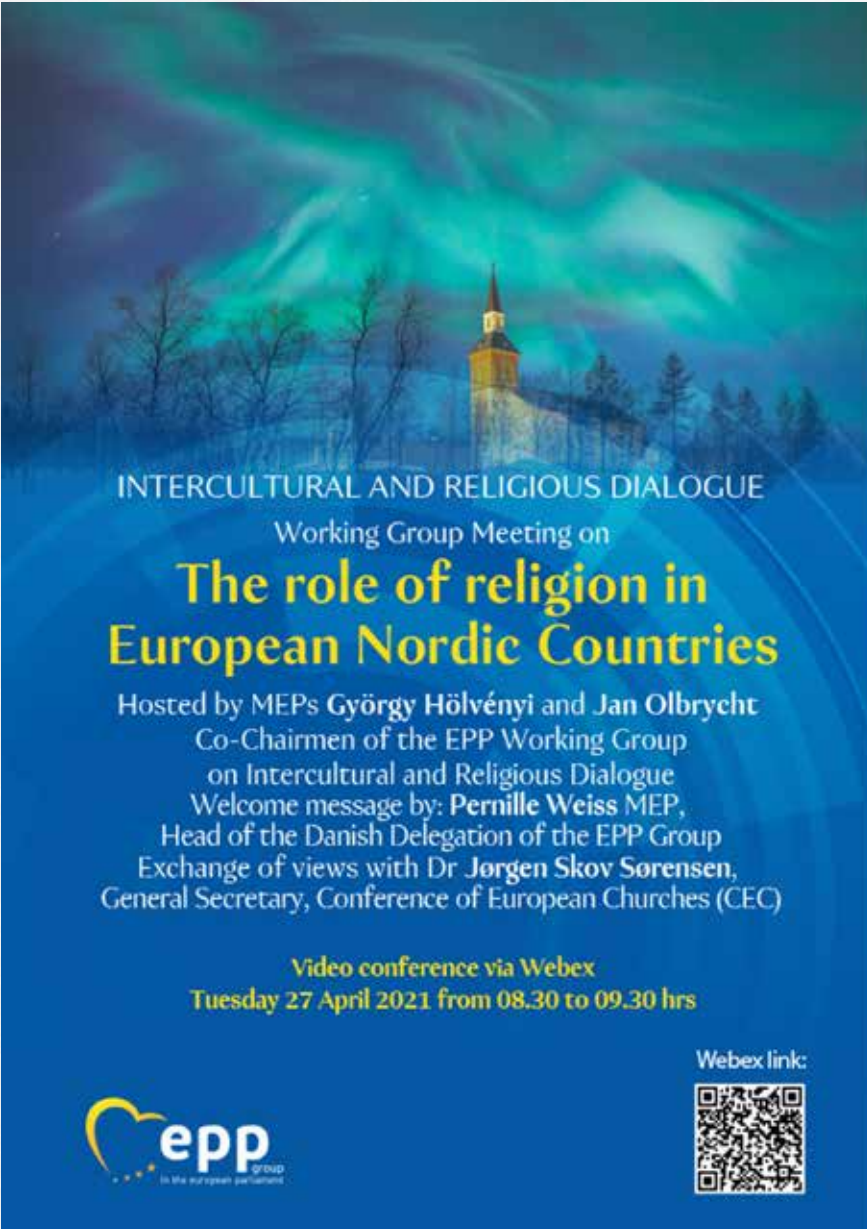


Fr. Nikodemus Claudius Schnabel said that when speaking about religion, people often view religion as either a problem or a solution. He added, religion is more than that. All religions preach a message of love and peace – that may not be quite enough. He suggested that another step is needed to be taken and religion could offer much more than just a message. He mentioned three issues within Europe: the rising of nationalism, the rising of ideologies, and the political field. All issues that when put beside religion are the exact opposite. Religion has no nation, has no bad intentions or ideologies, and

has no politics. He concluded that religion is the best medicine or the best vaccine against all forms of extremism.


MEP François-Xavier Bellamy fully agreed with Rabbi Jacobs on the matter that education is of importance, as education can change minds. A counter approach and a way to reconcile is what he spoke about, but the most important question he asked was: “*How to reconcile? How to create this counter approach?*” He explained that religion and identity are two concepts that affect the situation even more, as the youngest want to be a part of a collective identity and be recognised. “*We should be able to talk about our shared identity! We should be able to describe who we are!*” François-Xavier Bellamy said there should be no fear when speaking about a peaceful community you belong to.






INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Working Group Meeting on
**The role of religion in
European Nordic Countries**
Hosted by MEPs György Hölvényi and Jan Olbrycht
Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group
on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
Welcome message by: Pernille Weiss MEP,
Head of the Danish Delegation of the EPP Group
Exchange of views with Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen,
General Secretary, Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Video conference via Webex
Tuesday 27 April 2021 from 08.30 to 09.30 hrs

Webex link:




TUESDAY, 27 APRIL

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT “THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN EUROPEAN NORDIC COUNTRIES” WITH DR JØRGEN SKOV SØRENSEN, GENERAL SECRETARY, CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES (CEC)

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP**
2. Welcome message by: **Mrs. Pernille Weiss MEP**, Head of the Danish Delegation of the EPP Group
3. Exchange of views with **Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen**, General Secretary, Conference of European Churches (CEC) on The role of religion in European Nordic Countries
4. Any other business
5. Date of next meeting

BACKGROUND

On the 27th April 2021, the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit hosted a Working Group Meeting on the subject “**The role of religion in European Nordic Countries**”, with **Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen**, General Secretary, Conference of European Churches (CEC). Born in Kolding, Denmark, Skov Sørensen comes to CEC with a vast experience in theology, mission, ecumenism, leadership, communication and management. Skov Sørensen has a PhD in Missiology, Ecumenics and Systematic Theology from the University of Birmingham, UK, and M. Phil in Ecumenical Theology from Aarhus University in Denmark. He has served as general secretary at Danmission and led the department of ecumenical and international affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD).

SUMMARY



Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen structured his speech around three paradoxes to Church life in the Nordic Countries and three predictions. When people think about Nordic countries they do not associate them with religion, but more with secularism. However, religion is very important for these countries. The first paradox is related to secularity of the countries. What is interesting is that if you look at the National flags of the Nordic countries you see a cross lying down. There is a lot of history of this but it is interesting that in the most secular countries in the world the cross still has an important meaning. Maybe it is by coincidence, but he sees it as a sign that religion should be looked in another way in Nordic countries. For him, in the Nordic countries Christian


is not faith but Christian tradition is established in society. The second paradox is about Church and State. This relationship in the Nordic countries is a difficult context to explain to a foreigner. They are secular societies and they position themselves against a strong relation between Church and State. However, the Churches have a place in the Constitutions, they are actually mentioning at least in Denmark and Norway. There is a clear mentioning of the Churches as a part of society, and their importance and significance. In Sweden, Church and State have been separated since the year 2000, but there still exists some part of the secular legislation that speaks about the Church of Sweden and determines the delamination of the Church of Sweden to be Lutheran. So there is a strong link between State and Church but at the same time, they dissociate themselves with being too close in the relation of Church and State. In consequence, there is an interdependence among the two of them.

The third paradox is framed by a British sociologist when he speaks about Christianity in the Nordic countries and he describes it as: “belonging without believing”. This reflects the fact that they have these very large National Churches from a Lutheran background. Between 60 and 80% of the population of the Nordic countries belong to the National Churches. This means that they form big organisations, probably the largest organisation in these countries, larger than political associations. That does not mean that everyone is going to Church, but apparently from 60-80% of the population find some kind of relationship with the Church. This could be why these Churches are defined as “the popular Church”.

The speaker then moved on to the predictions. The first one is that in the future, short term and long term, we will see more identity seeking into the Christian heritage of the Nordic countries. With the pluralisation of the countries and the presence of other faiths, people will ask themselves about their identity. The local interest in Churches will increase, not necessarily an institutional interest in Churches but from people.

The second prediction is that in the future we will see more politicization of religion. Religion and politics have a delicate relation. What he thinks is that more political parties will utilize Christianity in their policy-making. Religion is a powerful political tool. We will probably see the nationalists using Christianity as a tool but we will also see a counteraction to this with the more activist view from the left wing. What it will be is a polarization of religion.

The third prediction is that we will see more attempts to translate Christianity into a secular society. Every time Christianity encounters a new kind of culture it has to be translated into a political culture and a secular culture. What we have seen in the Nordic countries is a large number of Christian think tanks that try to work on different issues seen from a Christian point of view.



INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Webinar on

Antisemitism in Europe

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

Dr Felix Klein, Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany
and the Fight against Antisemitism



Katharina von Schnurbein, European Commission Coordinator
on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life

Rabbi Avi Tawil, Director at European Jewish Community Centre

Hanna Kalmenson, Executive Managing Director at B'nai B'rith Europe

Robin Sclafani, Director of CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe

Video conference via Webex
Tuesday 11 May 2021 from 16.30 to 18.00 hrs



TUESDAY, 11 MAY

WEBINAR ON “ANTISEMITISM IN EUROPE”

PROGRAMME

16:30-16:40 **OPENING REMARKS AND WELCOME MESSAGE**

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

16:40-17:40 **PRESENTATIONS**

- **Dr Felix Klein**, Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism
- **Katharina von Schnurbein**, European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life
- **Rabbi Avi Tawil**, Director at European Jewish Community Centre
- **Hanna Kalmenson**, Executive Managing Director at B'nai B'rith Europe
- **Melissa Sonnino**, Coordinator of Facing Facts, CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe

17:40-18:00 **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

SUMMARY



On 11 May 2021, the EPP Working Group on “Intercultural and Religious Dialogue” hosted Conference on “**Antisemitism in Europe**”. The meeting was moderated by **MEP Jan Olbrycht**, Co-Chairman of the Working Group.

MEP Jan Olbrycht drew the attention of the audience to a document which has been presented in December 2020 – The Council Declaration on fighting. He then added that the seminar raises a few questions: “Where are we now in the 21st century? Is antisemitism a political, a social or a cultural problem? What is the situation today?”



Dr. Felix Klein, Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, took the floor. He began with the extermination of European Jews, and the prevention of it has become more important for the whole of Europe. However, **Dr. Klein** mentioned that there has been an increase in the violence against Jews across the continent. He then added that antisemitism is quite adaptable, given two phenomena in particular – anti-Israel antisemitism and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. He

focused his speech on the anti-Semitic hate comments, photo and video content across different social media platforms regarding the conspiracy theories and Jewish world domination. **Dr. Klein** said that the same source of hatred exists, as sadly the source of it did not die after the Holocaust. The aim is not only to eradicate antisemitism from our states but also to ensure that it no longer exists as part of people's mindsets. **Dr. Felix Klein** said that help will be needed from both state structures and civil societies. He stated that a lot of anti-Semitic crimes go unreported because the victims thought that nothing would change. Other offences are not deemed criminal ones but do affect the quality of life of Jewish people. The solution to that was a suggestion for setting up a European Reporting system.

Katharina von Schnurbein, European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life. She said that one of the problems is measurement on national level and reports on European level. In order to make antisemitism visible, there should be a joint European Reporting System, as mentioned already by Dr. Klein.

Mrs. von Schnurbein said that society should address antisemitism as it is a threat to democracy in every State and it is a responsibility of all. She also spoke about conspiracy theories, going back as far as the Black Death and how Jewish people were targeted then. She said that it was shocking how haters and antisemitism supporters do not stay only on the internet but go to the streets now, claiming they are the victims. She then said that certain structures and tools at both European and national level should be focused on young people.



Rabbi Avi Tawil, Director at European Jewish Community Centre started his speech with the focus on preventing antisemitism. He said that he is not sure if antisemitism can disappear as it is the oldest source of hatred. However, he also said that it is important to keep fighting and preventing it. **"The best way to fight antisemitism is through education."** He also agreed that working together on common actions is the way to go. The Rabbi finished by saying that for the first time he was seeing a real effort regarding the fight against antisemitism and that was through

the European Commission's strategy.



Hanna Kalmenson, Executive Managing Director at B'nai B'rith Europe shared a PowerPoint presentation about B'nai B'rith Europe, the oldest Jewish organisation in the world, represented in 24 countries in Europe and founded in 1843. She spoke of her own life journey and explained how important the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit is for her. **Mrs. Kalmenson** shared a few examples of antisemitism and their impact. How to combat antisemitism in a way that contributes to the whole society.

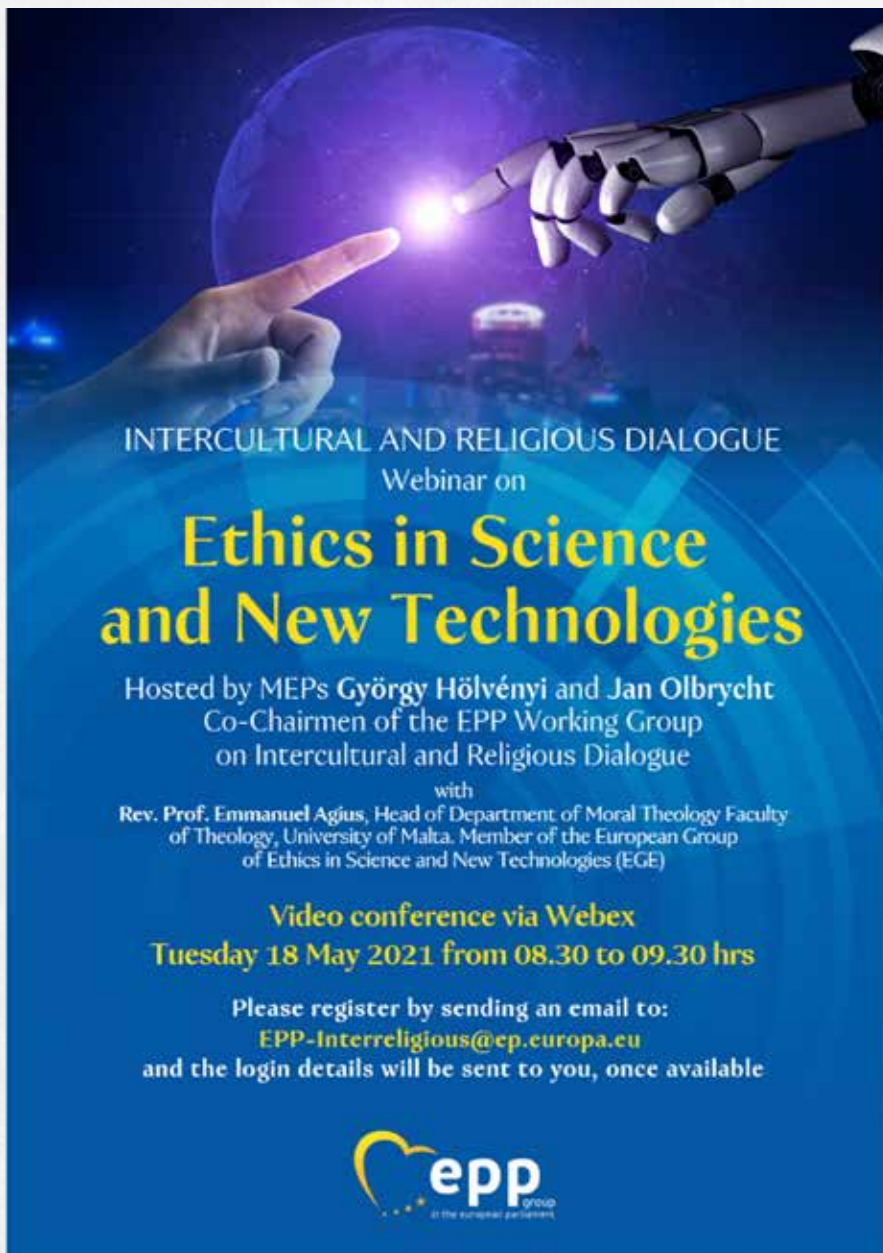
The ways to combat antisemitism is to battle the source of clichés, to understand the difference between equity and equality and to address antisemitism by building bridges between communities. She also suggested to share Jewish culture and to have days of sharing Jewish heritage in order to get to know Jewish culture and people better.



The last speaker was **Melissa Sonnino**, Coordinator of Facing Facts, CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe. She also made a presentation on "Building Intercultural-Religious dialogue in the anti-discrimination work." She explained the role of CEJI, defining it as an organisation that is a leading provider of diversity education and training and a voice for Jewish people at European level. Mrs. Sonnino presented the "pyramid of hate".

At the base is bias, such as stereotyping and belittling jokes. At the next level there are individual acts of prejudice, quickly followed by discrimination. These two levels include bullying, name-calling, de-humanisation, segregation, political and employment discrimination, etc. Going further into the pyramid there is bias-motivated violence: individual and community-based, such as rape, murder, vandalism, terrorism and assault. At the very top of the hate pyramid is genocide – the act or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire group of people. **Mrs. Sonnino** then said that the three main parts of an Intercultural and Religious Dialogue at CEJI are: advocacy, diversity education and Jewish engagement. She explained further the newest programme of CEJI – NOA – which focuses on anti-bias training, cultural activities and training and teaching tools regarding antisemitism.

The seminar finished on the following thought by **MEP Jan Olbrycht**: **"Dialogue is not talking to each other. It is to open to one another, to try to understand each other and make the effort to put oneself in the position of another. We do not organise talking hours, we organise seminars to understand each other and maybe step by step we shall reach success."**



INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Webinar on


Ethics in Science and New Technologies

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

with
Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Agius, Head of Department of Moral Theology Faculty
of Theology, University of Malta. Member of the European Group
of Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE)

Video conference via Webex
Tuesday 18 May 2021 from 08.30 to 09.30 hrs

Please register by sending an email to:
EPP-Interreligious@ep.europa.eu
and the login details will be sent to you, once available



epp
group
of the European Parliament

TUESDAY, 18 MAY

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT “ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES”
WITH REV. PROF. EMMANUEL AGIUS, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF MORAL THEOLOGY,
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF MALTA AND MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN GROUP
OF ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES (EGE)

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. Prof. Emmanuel Agius**, Head of Department of Moral Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Malta and Member of the European Group of Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE) on Ethics in Science and New Technologies
3. Any other business
4. Date of next meeting

BACKGROUND

Professor Emmanuel Agius is the former Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta. He is professor of Moral Theology and Philosophical Ethics at the University of Malta. Prof. Agius pursued his post-doctoral research in the field of bioethics at the University of Tübingen, Germany, as a fellow of the Alexander-von-Humboldt Stiftung, at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., as a Fulbright scholar, and at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, U.S.A., with the assistance of Theodore Hesburgh scholarship. He is the Head of the Department of Moral Theology at Faculty of Theology, since 2005 a member of the European Group of Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE), which is an advisory interdisciplinary group to the European Commission, and a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

SUMMARY

Prof. Emmanuel Agius explained the work of the European Group of Ethics (EGE) and what the group stands for. The EGE advises the Commission on all elements of EU laws and policy where ethical, social, and fundamental rights problems cross with the advancement of science and new technologies. The EGE also sets ethical norms and values globally. He spoke of evolution and change in technologies and science, as this is challenging society on how to discover new ways of mastering nature and technology and to improve human life.

Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Agius mentioned the changing and evolving of ethical theories, which is a very important note. On the question of technology the set of values, the rights and ethics are an



aspect that must be discussed. The EGE considers those as a challenge for cohesion and further unification, which is important for balancing the respect for pluralism and diversity of traditions. He continued saying that the evolution of science and technology, different from that in the medical field, is creating new vulnerabilities in society. Solidarity and common good, subsidiarity and proportionality are also part of the set of values that the EGE follows.

A basic and overarching value to have risen in science and technology is the question of scientific integrity. The speaker added that it is very important, and it endorses four basic principles: reliability, honesty, respect and accountability. Reliability in the sense that the EU cannot create a policy based on science and technology unless the quality of research is taken under consideration. Honesty in research and discovery has to be transparent, open and consistent. Those who are engaged in publishing results should publish both positive and negative aspects of their findings.

Prof. Agius then said that the opinions and overviews given by the EGE used to be mainly on modern biotechnology, food, genetics and cloning techniques, different issues regarding human genetics and so on. However, apart from these, the changes can be noticed in the concerns of the European Union. The EGE gives opinion on ethics and modern agriculture technologies, the impact of technology on the environment and bio-diversity, as well as the guiding principles on food-safety, food-security and sustainability.


He spoke of other areas such as: the integral ethical framework of assessment of production and use of energy, the question of cloning of animals for food production, health-technologies and citizens' participation in today's digital society, online research projects. They based their opinion on the Charter and the Treaties, because the set of values, principles and rights written in those texts are there to stay.

Prof. Agius continued with explaining that findings in science and technologies offer also a lot of uncertainty and knowledge gaps. He said that the society and the European Union cannot stand still, and we all have to move on at the same time as science moves on, develops and changes.

“What are the challenges of ethics when ethics are translated into governance and structure?” He listed a few general ideas about the challenges ahead for the European Union and the society: fundamental rights, democracy, the rule of law, global international order and legitimacy. No technology can develop without values and principles, as they are what shape technology and society itself. Values do not limit technology and set too big boundaries. Ethics put no obstacles and no limits to innovation regarding science and technology. They are the ethical compass indicating the responsibilities of building a future.

Prof. Agius said the European Union cannot be indifferent to the reality of Europe: pluralism and diversity of values. He then said the challenge is how to mediate them in concrete situations and put them into practice, rather than try to translate or interpret them. The mediation of shared values requires democracy. Democracy must be a part of the evolution of ethics in science and technology. The concept of shared values led the EGE to a democratic notion of ethics.

Prof. Agius finished with the following quote: ***“I think we need a common effort to bring values back to the people, to put the citizen in the centre of science and technologies. Not only by imposing values but by empowering the citizens to involve themselves into the dialogue of ethics and make science more trustworthy. So we can build a shared community of values in science and technologies.”***



Webinar on **Demographic Change and the Future of Europe**




Hosted by MEPs **György Hölvényi** and **Jan Olbrycht** Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
in cooperation with
Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE)

Welcome messages
Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group
Vincenzo Bassi, FAFCE President

Europe currently faces a demographic imbalance, as the elderly constitute an increasingly large percentage of the population and Europeans have fewer and fewer children. Parents face today too many obstacles in their everyday work and need to be given specific support related to family work-life balance. The full integration of working parents into the fabric of society would also constitute formal recognition of the value of their priceless care work. Following Pope Francis' intervention to the "States-General on Natality" in Rome, this webinar paves the way to a public discussion in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. In cooperation with EPP Group Members and Board Members of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE).

Video conference via Zoom (Interpretation: EN, FR)
Thursday 3 June 2021 from 16.30 to 17.30 hrs

Event registration:
<https://rb.gy/m152rc>



THURSDAY, 3 JUNE

WEBINAR ON **"DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE"**
IN COOPERATION WITH FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILY ASSOCIATIONS IN EUROPE
(FAFCE)

PROGRAMME

OPENING REMARKS

- **György Hölvényi** MEP and **Jan Olbrycht** MEP, Co-Chairmen of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
- **Nicola Speranza**, Secretary General, Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE)

WELCOME MESSAGES

- **Manfred Weber** MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group
- **Vincenzo Bassi**, FAFCE President

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

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

- **Roberta Metsola** MEP, First Vice-president of the EP, Responsible for the Parliament's dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organisations (Article 17 TFEU)
- **François-Xavier Bellamy** MEP, Head of the EPP Group French Delegation
- **György Hölvényi** MEP, Co-Chairman of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
- **Karlo Ressler** MEP, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Demographic Challenges, Family-Work, Balance and Youth Transitions and Vice-Chair of the AIDA Committee
- **Antoine Renard**, Honorary President, Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE), France
- **Pascale Morinière**, President of the National Confederation of Catholic Family Associations (CNAFC), France

BACKGROUND

Europe currently faces a demographic imbalance, as the elderly constitute an increasingly large percentage of the population and Europeans have fewer and fewer children.

Parents face today too many obstacles in their everyday work and need to be given specific support related to family work-life balance. The full integration of working parents into the fabric of society would also constitute formal recognition of the value of their priceless care work.

Following Pope Francis' intervention to the 'States-General on Natality' in Rome, this webinar paves the way to a public discussion in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, in cooperation with EPP Group Members and Board Members of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE).

SUMMARY

The distinguished guests of the event were: **MEP Manfred Weber**, *Chairman of the EPP Group*, **Mr. Vincenzo Bassi**, *FAFCE President* and **MEP Roberta Metsola**, *First Vice-president of the EP, Responsible for the Parliament's dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organisations (Article 17 TFEU)*.

Mr. Nicola Speranza explained the responsibility FAFCE has, as it represents 27 family associations in 17 different countries: to speak for the families and their real, daily concerns; and to create a network, share experiences and ensure development for the common good. He spoke of the role of the associations in a world where selfishness and consumption prevail. **"We are going towards a single generation society. Families are the key for this exchange. Families represent the heart, the recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic."** Concrete acts and policies are needed for families to grow, or we will have no future.



MEP Manfred Weber expressed his gratitude towards FAFCE and every single participant in the webinar. **"As Christian Democrats, we try to have value-based policies. It is our driving element. Healthy and strong families are one of the basic architectures of our society."** He shared that from 2015 to 2019, the labour market in Europe lost around 4 million people, which adds another dimension on the topic of the demographic crisis. The most important thing for politicians regarding families is to listen. **"Families should be seen in a broader sense, with grandparents, children and relatives. It is of importance to take care of the children's future."**

In societies where there is less youth, there is a risk where innovation is not attractive, and consumption becomes the focus. Also, young people leaving different parts of Europe results in some European areas losing youth. Definition of children's rights, care for young families, economic certainty were other aspects **Chairman Weber** talked about.



Mr. Vincenzo Bassi explained why demography is important and how FAFCE is involved, giving three reasons. First, it is needed to understand how demographic policies can impact the common good. Second, FAFCE does not obligate citizens to generate new lives but rather it supports the freedom of those who want to generate them by removing obstacle. Third, defeating the cliché that having children is against the sustainable development. It is not enough to take care of the demographic transition. The demographic challenges affect all areas of society, especially economic ones, he added. **"We have to do our best to reach and maintain an intergenerational balance. Demographic policies cannot be considered as a 'cost', they must be considered as an investment. Both economic and social policies have correlation to demographic policies."**

VP Roberta Metsola noted how essential the topic of demography is in the context of the future of Europe. **"By 2070, 30% of the population is projected to be aged 65 years or older when compared to just over 20% in 2019. 13% is projected to be 80 years or older compared to a bit less than 6% in 2019."** There is no one-size fits all approach because ultimately when we talk about demographic change it will affect everyone. It comes down to ensuring that no region or a single citizen is left behind, and that the policies to be made are efficient for everybody. She mentioned family-friendly policies and how they will shape the future of Europe, ensuring families of access to child-care and safe labour for the parents.



MEP François-Xavier Bellamy said that the most important thing is to listen to the voices of federations and associations related to FAFCE. It is not only a social or economic issue, the crisis of families is a key-issue and a part of our identity. He also mentioned the aspect of loneliness and how creating a family is one of the ways to 'leave' and fight loneliness. Trust can be created again only when unity within families is created and supported. Agreeing with Mr. Bassi, he also stated that families are an investment and that politicians must work on supporting families for the future of Europe.

MEP György Hölvényi said that without values and support for demography, society would focus only on consumption. One of the missions of the EPP is to nurture families and steer the political debate regarding family-issues. He spoke about replacing fear with hope and open responsibility. Responsibility should be shared between church, state, and organisations in order to help break the stigma around family building. **"Individualism has weakened the cohesive power of family."**





MEP Karlo Ressler, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Demographic Challenges, Family-Work Balance and Youth Transitions and Vice-Chair of the AIDA Committee began his speech with highlighting how the topic of demographic challenges is one of the most neglected ones. The deeper and broader view should be a precondition for all the other policies, especially in the phase in which Europe encounters a significant paradox. ***“While Europe has never been wealthier, the demographics have never been worse. This shows that economic growth is not the only parameter that we should take under consideration, although it is quite important.”*** The debate should also focus on how to include the elderly and make them an active part of our society, which means more age-friendly policies.

Mr. Antoine Renard, Honorary President, Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE), France. ***“Every society which wants a future, needs to face the reality of how important children are.”*** He continued his speech with four points. First, fewer marriages and lower fertility rate, result in very concerning numbers for the following years. Second, economic and social issues are directly affected by the demographic crisis. The third point was that parents need homes for their children, jobs to look after their families and a balance between work and personal lives. The final point was understanding the cultural environment and opening to spirituality.



Mrs. Pascale Morinière, President of the National Confederation of Catholic Family Associations (CNAFC), France. She spoke of what has changed and how family-friendly policies were now viewed as a tool against individualism and individuality. Numbers were given on France’s fertility rate, going down from 2 children per woman in 2013 to 1.83 children per woman in 2018. The lack of family-friendly policies is one of the reasons for this index decrease. **Mrs. Morinière** added that the CNAFC is already drafting a series of measures, with the main principles being: differentiating family-policies which need to be universal to couples who want to have children and contribute to national solidarity and developing global coherent policies.

MEP Miriam Lexmann, Member of the Intergroup on Demographic Challenges, Family-Work Balance and Youth Transitions, said that it is a very timely event, as the demographic challenges are not only economic but challenges of civilisation. ***“Our continent used to be ‘old continent’ because of the history and rich culture, but now unfortunately is old because of age.”*** She noted that while life expectancy has improved, young people are now afraid of having children because of many economic reasons. **Mrs. Lexmann** highlighted the importance of infrastructure for the families so they can have access to care and support for the elderly



or people with disabilities who are family members. Also, support for the families regarding the educational system. She looked into the justice of the social system, speaking of mothers and the types of job they have to find in order to be flexible and take care of their children. It all results in those women living in poverty when they are older because the pension system is not counting the value of time they spent taking care of their children.




Mr. Ulrich Hoffmann, President of Familienbund der Katholiken, Germany, remembered that the European birth rate has dropped dramatically. From around 2.7 children per woman in the 1950s to around 1.6 children per woman today. Family-policies can influence the birth rate and raise it once again. He highlighted three points: work life balance, enough time for family life and fair recognition of the care work of the families. ***“Support for families is just and fair, an investment in the future. If there are structural disadvantages for families, they will get less children than they wish to have. However, if there is a family-friendly framework people will change their view on having children and family life in Europe will flourish again.”***

MEP Jan Olbrycht closed the Webinar with a memory of Pope Francis speaking before the European Parliament. ***“Politicians are polite and careful like a ‘donna’, but we will not have the future if we are careful. We need a change.”*** He thanked everybody for participating.



EPP WORKING GROUP 'INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'
in cooperation with Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)





Conference on
The situation of Christians and Religious Communities in the World

Presentation of the 15th Annual Report on Religious Freedom in the World 2021

Hosted by MEPs György Hölvényi and Jan Olbrycht Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
with
Marcela Szymanski, Editor in Chief and Head of the EU Office (ACN)
Father Sylvester Joseph, Diocesan Director for Justice and Peace, Pakistan
Father Joseph Fidelis, Director of the Trauma Centre of Maiduguri, Nigeria
Dr. Ewelina Ochab, Advocate, author and co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response

Video conference via Webex
Wednesday, 23 June 2021 from 15:00 to 17:00 CET

Please register by sending an email to:
EPP-Interreligious@ep.europa.eu
and the login details will be sent to you, once available



WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE

CONFERENCE ON "THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE WORLD" IN COOPERATION WITH AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED (ACN)

PROGRAMME

15:00 WELCOMING ADDRESSES

- György Hölvényi MEP and Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairmen of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
- 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)

15:15 INTERVENTIONS

Moderator: Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairman of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
Presentation of the 15th Annual Report on Religious Freedom in the World 2021 ACN video

- Marcela Szymanski, Editor in Chief and Head of the EU Office, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)

15:45 EXPERTS' TESTIMONIES

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

- Father Sylvester Joseph, Diocesan Director of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Pakistan - The impact of blasphemy laws, abduction and sexual enslavement of women
- Father Joseph Fidelis, Director of the Trauma Centre of Maiduguri, Nigeria - Intensification of the attacks by Islamist extremist groups during the pandemic
- Dr. Ewelina Ochab, Advocate, author and co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response - The repression of the Uyghurs in China

16:30 DISCUSSION AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

16:55 CONCLUDING REMARKS

- György Hölvényi MEP and Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chairmen of the WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

SUMMARY

On June 23rd, 2021, the EPP Working Group on “Intercultural and Religious Dialogue” hosted a Web Conference on *“The situation of Christians and Religious Communities in the World – Presentation of the 15th Annual Report on Religious Freedom in the World 2021.”* in cooperation with Aid to the Church in Need (ACN International). MEPs György Hölvényi and Jan Olbrycht, Co-Chairmen of the Working Group moderated the meeting.



The speakers were: **Mrs. Marcela Szymanski**, Editor in Chief and Head of the EU Office, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). **Father Sylvester Joseph**, Diocesan Director for Justice and Peace, Pakistan. **Father Joseph Fidelis**, Director of the Trauma Centre of Maiduguri, Nigeria. And **Dr. Ewelina Ochab**, Advocate, author, and co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response.

The conference began with a brief presentation video of the “15th Annual Report on Religious Freedom in the World 2021” by ACN. In the video, the main points made were regarding violation against fundamental human rights of religious freedom.

MEP György Hölvényi welcomed the participants and guests. He said that the presentation gave a very serious start to the discussion of this important topic.

MEP Roberta Metsola, Vice-President of the European Parliament gave a short welcoming speech. *“No violence can be justified in the name of God.”* Despite the fact that Christianity remains the most widely practiced religion, in some regions of the world Christians are considered a minority. Organisations promoting religious hate and committing hate crimes cannot be allowed any space to operate. Sexual violence is used often as a weapon against religious minorities, crimes against girls and women are used as a fundamental strategy in order to make certain religious groups disappear. **The Vice-President** said that while she is in charge of Article 17, she will make sure to continue to work on the basis of securing freedom of religion and believes.



Mrs. Marcela Szymanski took the floor. She explained that the ACN helps churches where persecution of Christians or manmade disasters have happened. The funding comes from private individuals, as the ACN cannot accept funds from any Government or Governmental structures. The help provided goes to different areas, such as: education, health, vulnerable communities, etc. Part of the mission is the information aspect, where the ACN expects to be able to foresee some of the catastrophes and violent acts based on statistics, reports and data. Mrs. Szymanski spoke about the main findings of the Annual Report: all the countries showcased commit hate-crimes and are rarely prosecuted for them, not only that, but religious people are being attacked in religious buildings and that is considered the ‘new normal’. She made sure to point out that while it is important to hear where and when such acts are happening, it is even more important to hear to whom these acts are happening. She reminded that not everything is statistics, and the victims of such hate-crimes are real people, who had suffered under the devastating effects of these acts.



Father Joseph Fidelis spoke about the situation of religious hate-crimes in Nigeria. He started with the intensification of the attacks and how gradually these terroristic acts were taking control in North-East Nigeria. **Father Fidelis** also gave a brief presentation, showcasing data and statistics, while explaining the rise of extremism in his country. He explained that while there might be a decline in the power of ISIS in Syria, there has been a rising of it in Sudan, for example. There are 4 motives for threats of extremism: the Caliphate, resource control, sex slavery and global networking. **Father Fidelis** focused on one case of sex slavery and sexual abuse done in the name of ‘religious hate-crimes’. He spoke of one girl who had witnessed the beheading of her own father. She was then later kidnapped by the same group and was violated and abused in the most brutal ways. There are murders, systematic kidnappings and ransoms, harassment and abuse, as well as forceful conversion of young male and female Christians. He mentioned a few possible solutions on what could be done against these hateful crimes and terroristic attacks. Engagement with the Civil Society to strengthen the democratic structures in Nigeria, strong international policies, dialogue with stakeholders, better quality of education, direct local engagement and the Church in Nigeria asking for the Sharia to be repelled. One of the most important tools of prevention of such horrors is deradicalization and counter-radicalisation. He expressed his gratitude to the European Union for helping and investing itself in many policies and missions helping to prevent radicalism and persecution of Christians.

Father Sylvester Joseph spoke about freedom of religion in Pakistan, saying that Christians do have some rights. Nevertheless, he said that many people feel afraid of the possible terror that might happen to them because of their choice of religion. He mentioned a lot of laws that are not exactly safe for religious minorities in Pakistan, such as the blasphemy law. *“Security of victims should be provided, but also security of those who have been accused on the basis of the blasphemy law.”* He spoke on ‘forced conversion’ and how that is a major problem in Pakistan.



Solution lies in changes and adaptation of legislation. Biased education is also an issue, as there was a certain number of people involved with the shaping of educational materials. Members of the Catholic Church have expressed their desire to the Government, to also be a part of the making of educational content.



Dr. Ewelina Ochab was focusing on the Uyghurs in China and the persecutions against them. The Coalition for Genocide Response does not only invest themselves in the issue with the Uyghurs, but the many signs of genocide made the Coalition focus on the matter. **Dr. Ochab** stated that in recent years, several media reported about the crimes against Uyghur Muslims in China, who have been detained in camps for ‘re-educational purposes’. Studies show that these communities are subjected to violence, abuse, and modern-day slavery. Women are forced to sterilisation. Evidence shows that women in such camps are subjected to systematic rape, according to a BBC investigation. **Dr. Ochab** said that a woman came forward as a victim of gang-rape, as she was raped by up to 20 men three times in the camp. She was also physically tortured and abused. She said that evidence also shows that acts of forced sterilisation and forced abortions have taken place, as reported in 2020. These are only two of the genocide methods and tools used by the Government against the communities. ***“In order for these acts to be considered as a genocide, they have to be perpetrated with a specific intent to destroy a certain group.”*** These actions have been recognized as genocide by the US Government, the Canadian Parliament, Dutch Parliament and the UK House of Commons, among others. **Dr. Ochab** pointed out that Uyghurs may not be only targeted because of ethnicity but also because of their religious beliefs, as they are labelled as extremists. This persecution of religious minorities is evident in China, and it includes Christians, as well. According to reports, shared by **Dr. Ochab**, Christians were being locked in vans and forced to renounce their faith. Data has been collected on the account of all those horrific religious and ethnic hate-crimes in China. However, reports have been made on hacker-attacks in order for that data to be destroyed and a future prosecution in court to be made impossible. She said that there are several mechanisms and structures that the United Nations can act upon. However, China holds a veto right in some structures which makes an adoption of a resolution to collect and save data impossible. **Dr. Ochab** concluded with the following: ***“A mechanism that will help collect and save the evidence of the horrible genocide acts towards Uyghurs and other religious minorities is a step that cannot be postponed.”***

WEDNESDAY, 30 JUNE

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT “THE CHALLENGES BEING FACED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC” WITH H.E. MS ISMAT JAHAN, AMBASSADOR AND HEAD OF THE PERMANENT MISSION ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)

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. Ms Ismat Jahan**, Ambassador and Head of the Permanent Mission Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on “The challenges being faced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”.
3. Questions & Answers

SUMMARY

A Working group meeting regarding the challenges being faced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was held on 30 June 2021. **Mr György Hölvényi MEP** and **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP** opened the meeting.

Mr György Hölvényi expressed his gratitude towards **Ms. Ismat Jahan** for attendance and underlined that this dialogue has started fifteen years ago, but the current meeting was dedicated to more practical issues regarding the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.



H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan expressed her gratitude for the invitation and underlined that it is always a pleasure to interact with the EPP intercultural and religious dialogue unit. Then she expressed her deep condolence towards the people, who lost their loved ones in the pandemic. She also underlined the importance of solidarity between each other in the pandemic and post-pandemic period, also mentioned the necessity of socio-economic recovery for people, who have suffered from the COVID-19. According to her, the OIC organization, Islamic solidarity Fund, and Islamic Development Bank support less developed countries for a speedy recovery. They conduct not only financial or economic support but also humanitarian missions and are trying to enable less developed countries to make the diagnose of virus and to teach them how to tackle the COVID-19. The most important support is access to vaccines, which remains still inaccessible for many people all around the world. According to statistics, there are only 16 doses of vaccine for hundred inhabitants in some regions. International co-operation around the world is very important to reduce the problems related to education regarding the vaccine.

H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan mentioned, that during the pandemic anti-Muslim attitude has increased all over the world, attitude towards the refugees, asylum seekers. Governments and international organizations should support them. One more important case is related to gender equality. According to statistics too many women are suffering from domestic violence in the pandemic. The problems have also increased regarding seniors and people with disabilities. **Ms. Ismat Jahan** also underlined the children's rights and the challenges they face in these hard times. The biggest problem is that these children are not able to have access to education.

H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan underlined two positive points in this difficult situation. The first one is solidarity between the states and cultures in the pandemic, intercultural dialogue between them, and the second one is the digital platform, which has been developed all around the world.

H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan stated that the OIC organization will give support to people who suffer from the pandemic, despite the fact, that it is not a direct religious organization. Many aspects and problems appeared during the pandemic regarding Muslim societies in the world and their interaction with other cultures. Solidarity, and co-operation still remain in their field of work. Governments should support Muslim communities in non-Muslim states because they face many challenges in their daily life.

H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan underlined the role of social media in this process. Frequently, some radical groups are spreading illegal hate speeches on social media and are trying to increase Islamophobia, Xenophobia, and hate between the people. Muslims are accused of terrorism just because they are Muslims, despite the fact that very often more Muslims are suffering from terrorist attacks than anyone else. Many important steps have contributed to stop this process, including the declaration of the Council of Europe and the resolution about Global Policy against Islamophobia. But effective legal reforms should be made at national and at European level to tackle this problem.

H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan expressed her gratitude once more for the invitation and for the opportunity to have an intercultural dialogue, which reduces the facts of hate crime.

TUESDAY, 6 JULY

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT "RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE" WITH MR. CHRISTOS STYLIANIDES, SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE PROMOTION OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF OUTSIDE THE EU

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 **Mr. Christos Stylianides**, newly appointed Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU
3. Any other business
4. Date of next meeting

SUMMARY

Since the creation of the Special Envoy's function by the President of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker in May 2016, an increased awareness of the worldwide threat to religious freedom could be observed.

Mr Stylianides is a friend for many MEPs: during his time as the EU Commissioner in charge of humanitarian aid and crisis management, he frequently met with non-European Church leaders belonging to the circle of cooperation partners of the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue.

In the EU institutional framework, the EPP Group can help enhancing the Special Envoy's visibility, effectiveness and recognition by inviting him to EPP Group events to report regularly about his activities.

MEPs György Hölvényi and **Jan Olbrycht**, Co-chairmen of the Working Group welcomed all the guests. They expressed how hard it was to push for the nomination of a new Special Envoy, after the terminated mandate of Mr. Jan Figel at the end of 2019 but also how important and crucial it was to have a new Special Envoy.



Mr. Christos Stylianides mentioned that the Working Group is not just an ally but part of his family. *"I strongly believe, you can help me with specific proposals and specific approaches in many countries where the problem of Religious Freedom is present."* Mr. Stylianides mentioned he had been also an MEP and a Commissioner, and that he had engaged in religious issues both directly and indirectly. He added that they had already started close cooperation in finding new and innovative ways in order to bring together and improve the collaboration with the external services. He said he wanted to be very transparent and very clear about the responsibilities of

Members supporting his mission. He added that he would turn to the Working Group for help with these issues regarding structure, if he cannot seem to manage it himself.

A third point **Mr. Christos Stylianides** made was, that the role of the Special Envoy is not just to put visibility on demanding issues. “We have to be in touch with all religious issues in specific states and countries. Otherwise, we will speak on pressing problems without actual results and solutions. Our engagement through announcements is good but a debate must be started in each country where human rights issues regarding religion exist”.

MEP Roberta Metsola, Vice-President of the European Parliament asked a couple of questions. She asked if the Special Envoy had contacted other groups within the European Parliament and what was the reaction. She also asked how the Special Envoy sees his part in the political discourse on those issues and how he would continue to strengthen and ensure the freedom of religious belief. She mentioned the Treaties and the Founding documents of the European Union and their importance and moral support of religious freedom. The last question was about the view and further contributions of Mr. Stylianides on the Future of Europe.

Mr. Stylianides said he had arranged meetings with the leaders of Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Renew Europe Group, European Conservatives and Reformists Group and the Group of the Greens. He said he hoped the meetings would be productive. *“I know that my predecessor experienced some issues with some political groups. I will be trying to overcome those issues that had happened in the past.”* He said he needed the support of the EPP Group, to convince other groups in the Parliament that this is not just an ‘EPP mission’ but a joint European Union mission. He said it was our joint duty to support people outside of the European Union and help them if they experience religious discrimination. Regarding the Future of Europe, he said he needed to brainstorm together with Group members and Ms. Metsola herself on how to improve and contribute.

The meeting ended with a Q&A session. There were questions regarding the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, human rights issues, Christian culture heritage, common goals and solutions, and pending issues.

TUESDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER

WORKING GROUP MEETING ABOUT “ANTI MUSLIM HATRED IN EUROPE”
WITH **MR DANIEL HÖLTGEN**, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT THE COUNCIL OF
EUROPE, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON ANTISEMITIC, ANTI-MUSLIM AND OTHER FORMS
OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AND HATE CRIMES

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Exchange of views on “Anti Muslim hatred in Europe” with: **Mr Daniel Höltgen**, Director of Communications at the Council of Europe, Special Representative on antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes
3. Questions & Answers

SUMMARY

Daniel Höltgen is the Director of Communications and Special Representative on anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes since November 2020.

He previously worked in senior positions for the German government and at the European Commission. Born 13 February 1967 in Bonn, Germany, Daniel is British and German and holds a Ph.D. in economic geography from the University of Cambridge. He has a diploma from the Catholic School of journalism in Munich.

György Hölvényi MEP, Co-chairman stated that the hatred is not a new phenomenon but has new elements, so we need to encourage the relevant bodies: at regional, national and international levels to take the necessary measures. We need to distinguish between direct and indirect types of discrimination against Muslims. The fight against the discrimination of religion or belief has been one of the main elements of the EPP group. This group has been acting and promoting dialogue in the EP because of the conviction that the dialogue is a very special opportunity to prevent conflicts and build social cohesion.

Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-chairman: raised a question: when we discuss the persecution we need to clarify what we mean by this. It is needed to distinguish between discrimination that is the lack of equal treatment and persecution. Is hatred placed in the discrimination or the persecution? The question is: What is it that we are facing, discrimination or persecution?

Daniel Höltgen

- As a part of the Council of Europe (CoE), his work is based in the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), more specifically in art. 9: freedom of religion and belief, and art. 14: protection from discrimination of any kind, including discrimination against religion or belief. - Today (14/09/2021) the CoE together with the ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) is releasing a recommendation on combating anti-Semitism.



- We need to focus on hate speech online, because what we see online is inspiring extremists to crimes and to murder.
- He made a survey that revealed that much of the hatred against Muslims online is posted anonymously, and the difference with anti-Semitism is that most of the hate attacks online are not reported.
- Another concern is the “Islam map” in Austria: the effect of publishing a map of all religious organizations of one specific denomination and under the heading “political Islam”.

He explained that he is less concerned about private opinions, and more concerned when opinions become manifestly illegal and when major platforms help to distribute that kind of hatred: he is not dealing with private opinions, but the public fear and responsibilities of authorities. Also, that the EU is progressing with the Digital Service Act which is implemented for a bigger responsibility on the big Internet companies to take down manifestly illegal hate speech or whatever kind of discrimination or persecution., And the CoE is preparing a recommendation on tackling hate speech from the Human Rights perspective, online and offline hate speech.

Finally, he underlined that the relation between art. 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and art. 10 (freedom of expression) is complicated but there is a clear line. There is no doubt that what is manifestly illegal offline should be illegal online and national and European law have to set the standards. There is a part of the hate speech below this limit and there a societal debate is needed. It is a matter of education; that is why his work focuses on things that are manifestly illegal or that incite to manifestly illegal actions.

28 - 30 OCTOBER

“THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIANS IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION” KRAKOW, POLAND

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2021: INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL CENTER, 25 MAIN SQUARE

16.00 – 17.00 REGISTRATION

EVENING EVENT: BISHOP PIERONEK AND HIS EUROPE

17.00 SHORT MOVIE ABOUT BISHOP TADEUSZ PIERONEK

17.15 DISCUSSION:

- **Prof. Hanna Suchocka**, former Prime Minister of Poland in 1992-1993
- **Prof. Rocco Buttiglione**, Institute of Philosophy “Edith Stein”, Granada
- **Prof. Andrzej Zoll**, Jagiellonian University, Ombudsman of the Republic of Poland in 2000-2006
- **Rev. Kazimierz Sowa**, Journalist and publicist

19.00 DINNER

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2021: KRZYSZTOFORY PALCE, 35 MAIN SQUARE

11.00 – 12.00 REGISTRATION

12.00 – 12.30 WELCOME:

- **Michał Góra PhD**, Organizing Committee, Head of the Board of the Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation

OPENING:

- **Jan Olbrycht PhD**, Vice-President of the EPP Group in the European Parliament
- **Andrzej Halicki**, President of the Polish Delegation in the EPP in the European Parliament
- **Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich**, President of COMECE

12.30 – 14.30 I PANEL SESSION

VALUE SYSTEMS CRISIS – CONTEMPORARY VISION OF HUMAN BEING

INTRODUCTION:

- **Rev. prof. Tomáš Halik**, President of the Czech Christian Academy, Charles University, Prague

DISCUSSION:

- **Massimiliano Signifredi PhD**, Sant'Egidio Community
- **Rev. Manuel Barrios Prieto**, Secretary General of the COMECE
- **Bp. Jerzy Samiec**, Head of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church in Poland

MODERATION:

- **Jan Tombiński**, Ambassador, former High Representative of EU to the Apostolic See and FAO

14.30 - 15.30 LUNCH

15.30 - 17.30 II PANEL SESSION

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW CRISIS

INTRODUCTION:

- **Radek Sikorski**, Member of the European Parliament, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in 2004-2014

DISCUSSION:

- **Prof. Fryderyk Zoll**, Jagiellonian University
- **Roberta Metsola**, Vice-President of the European Parliament
- **Prof. Maciej Szpunar**, first Advocate General at the Court of Justice of the European Union

MODERATION:

- **Prof. Jarosław Flis**, lecturer at Jagiellonian University

18.00

CONCELEBRATED HOLY MASS **BP JANUSZ STEPNOWSKI**, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE POLISH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE IN COMECE, **BP ANTOINE HEROUARD**, PRESIDENT OF THE COMECE COMMISSION ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS SAINTS PETER AND PAUL CHURCH, 54 GRODZKA STREET

19.00

CEREMONY OF THE **TADEUSZ PIERONEK'S AWARD – "IN VERITATE"**: FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS IN COMBINING CHRISTIAN AND EUROPEAN VALUES" FOR **HORST LANGES** AND **REV. PROF. TOMÁŠ HALIK**

20.00

DINNER AT THE INVITATION OF **PROF. JACEK MAJCHROWSKI**, MAYOR OF KRAKOW

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2021 KRZYSZTOFORO PALCE, 35 MAIN SQUARE

10.00 - 11.00

REGISTRATION

11.00 - 13.00

III PANEL SESSION

CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS – A CALL FOR GLOBAL SECURITY

INTRODUCTION:

- **Kamil Wyszkowski**, President of the board of the Global Compact Network Poland

DISCUSSION:

- **Dorota Jarońska MD PhD**, WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, Bonn
- **Adam Jarubas PhD**, Member of the European Parliament, Poland
- **Bp Antoine Hérouard**, Auxiliary bishop of Lille, COMECE

MODERATION:

- **Dominika Wantoła**, Gazeta Wyborcza

13.00 - 13.15

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

- **Michał Góra PhD**, Organizing Committee, Head of the Board of the Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation

13.30

LUNCH

SUMMARY

The project of debates on Europe organized for 20 years under the symbolic slogan "The role of the Catholic Church in the process of European integration", due to changing circumstances, was implemented this year under the motto "The role of Christians in the process of European integration". In fact, this change greatly expands the scope for debate. Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek's idea to conduct a dialogue between the Church and the institutions of the European

Union is now even more relevant.

From the 28th to the 30th October 2021, the 21th International Conference took place in Krakow. The event was organized by the Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation, and the co-organizers were the Robert Schuman Foundation in Luxembourg, the European People's Party Group in the European Parliament, the Polish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP, the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union COMECE.



The conference was divided in three thematic panel sessions:

1. "Value systems crisis – contemporary vision of human being"
2. "Representative democracy and rule of law crisis"
3. "Climate change crisis – a call for global security".

"Judeo-Christian values cannot be ignored in the European Union, because it is based on the fruits of a long historical process, rich in many elements of religious traditions" – said Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich to the participants of the international conference "The role of Christians in the process of European integration". The President of the Commission of the Episcopates of the European Community pointed to the role of Christians in the face of crises of values, democracy and climate. He emphasized that Christians in a polarized world are called to practice promoting dialogue. He drew attention to the problems of crises of values, democracy and climate and their consequences for the whole of humanity. "The very word 'crisis' and the discussion of the role of Christians makes me think of the letter to Diogenet. In this second-century scripture it is said that what is the soul in the body is Christians in the world. I think that this is exactly the vocation of Christians in today's society, in Europe. We are facing crises and this is how we should act," he said.

Rev. Prof. Tomas Halik., in the introduction to the discussion "The crisis of value systems - a contemporary vision of man", said that: "We cannot allow populists and nationalists to misuse the terminology and certain symbols of Christianity to misdirect Christian energy for their own

interests. We cannot allow them to discredit the Church and Christianity" The 1st panel meeting was attended by Dr. Massimiliano Signifredi (Sant'Egidio), Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto (Secretary General of COMECE) and Bishop Jerzy Samiec (Evangelical-Augsburg Church). The panel was moderated by Jan Tombiński.

Prof. Halik, pointed out that every crisis is a certain opportunity for transformation. He discussed important concepts in the theological perspective: crisis, kairos, metanoia: "These three concepts are contained in the first sermon of Christ: time is fulfilled, be transformed".

"Climate crisis – an alert for global security" was the topic of the third panel. The participants in the discussion were Bishop Antoine Herouard (COMECE), Dorota Jarosińska, PhD (WHO European Centre for Environment and Health) and Dr. Adam Jarubas (MEP). The panel was moderated by Dominika Szczawińska.

Kamil Wyszowski, President of the Council of the UN Global Contact Network introduced the discussion. He pointed out that business is the reality that hits the climate the hardest. He pointed to the problem of ordering research under a predetermined thesis. He stressed the need to fight such hypocrisy, to expose it and the accompanying crisis of ethics in business. Referring to scientific research, he stated that there is no doubt a violent phenomenon of climate destabilization, and scientific evidence clearly indicates that human activity has contributed to this and still contributes. He noted that ignorance is intellectual laziness, and laziness is one of the main sins. He pointed out that climate instability contributes, among others, to preventing the planning of crops or other human activities.



TUESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2021

WORKING GROUP MEETING ON "THE CONFLICT IN TIGRAY AND THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN ETHIOPIA"

AGENDA

1. Opening by the Co-Chairmen of the Working Group **Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP** and **Mr György Hölvényi MEP**
2. Exchange of views on about the conflict in Tigray and the situation of Christian communities in Ethiopia with: **Hagos Abrha Abay** (PhD, Ethiopic Philology), Postdoctoral fellow in CSMC, Hamburg University, Ass. Professor in Mekelle University (St. Yared Center), Founder and principal coordinator of "Mahilete Gumaye", Initiatives for Culture (MaGIC) in Tigray
3. Questions & Answers

BACKGROUND

With over 80 ethnic groups, Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. In terms of numerical and territorial importance, Ethiopia's 80 ethnic groups are disparate. Ethiopia has been a Federal Republic since 1994, with the official name "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia." It is divided into 10 ethnically-based regional states ("Killil"), each with significant autonomy, and two autonomous cities with regional state status. The Tigrayans are one of these ethnic groups, and they have been a source of power and authority in Ethiopia, having controlled the government for thirty years.

The Tigray People's Liberation Front dominated the government coalition of four ethno-regional parties until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, an Oromo ethnic group member, was elected in 2018. In 2018, there were corruption trials towards Tigrayan leaders, and the TPLF interpreted as an attack to the Tigrayan elite. In March 2020, the government formally announced the postponement of the August 2020 national elections due to the COVID crisis. The TPLF did not accept the postponement and saw it as an attempt by Abi Ahmed to stay in power. On 3 November 2020, the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) attacked several federal military bases of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF). Its leader claimed that it was a pre-emptive operation in response to the regrouping of federal troops on Tigray's southern border and the central government's plan to launch a military operation to arrest Tigray's leaders. In response to the attacks on the armed bases, Abiy Ahmed declared on 4 November 2020 a six-month state of emergency in Tigray and announced the launch of a military operation. On 5 November 2020, the federal army began to conduct air strikes.

The recent statements by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, in which he denies the existence of famine in Tigray and accusing humanitarian aid organizations of trying to support Tigrayan rebels, had raised concerns in the international community about the government's strategy to maintain a blockade of Tigray with the objective to sabotage the TPLF leadership.

SUMMARY



Ethiopian government, have also manipulated it into their own respective motives.

In February 2021, the Tigray Orthodox Church Diocese made a clear documentation of 326 priests brutally killed, but many more were killed after that; and a priest in Tigray is multi-professional: religious leader, a church servant, a farmer, a manuscript producer, a traditional/church schoolteacher. Tigray heritage icons were also targeted and destroyed; hundreds of monasteries and churches were damaged and shelled; manuscripts, ecclesiastical materials, and private properties were looted and/or burned down. Moreover, archeological sites, museums and historical places were part of the target of the brutality.

Based on the Christian and cultural values in Ethiopia (mainly Tigray), churches and monasteries were untouchable during crises, and were used as sanctuaries, reconciliation settings and conflict resolving institutions; elders and clergies were respected and used to have various customary laws of peace and stability. However, these days, those values happened to be vandalized when members of the previously mentioned forces abruptly entered temples during mass services for intimidation, hunted monks and priests from their caves and monasteries, raped elderly women and nuns in front of their relatives.

It is a historical irony when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Council (Synod) in Addis Ababa failed to condemn the brutalities against its own Christian community and heritages; only the patriarch, originally from Tigray, who was in a house arrest had condemned the crises but was even opposed by many members of the synod. Subsequently, the Tigray Orthodox Church Diocese, few months ago, made a press release against the reluctance of the Synod, and even claimed it doesn't belong anymore to the same church council if the disinclination continuous. There is a clear tendency for the division of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Tigrayans are now under long lasting trauma; many are questioning their belief and value systems; some raped women are committing suicide; this social crisis is the most lingering issue that may result to the values' decay. The existing complex political and human crisis has created hostile environment in East Africa in general; hence, the international community and responsible bodies should support in a practical matter to bring it into an end.

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