



XXIII ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS



THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

9 DECEMBER 2020

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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.

The EPP Group is the only political Group in the European Parliament that holds a structured and regular dialogue with churches and religious organisations. EPP Group MEPs, religious leaders, government representatives, NGOs, guests and the interested public participate in the annual dialogue conferences. These high-level events discuss current issues pertinent to the European Union, intercultural relations and the dialogue between religions and politics.

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

 **epp**
group
in the european parliament

Interpretation:
EN, FR, DE

XXIII ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

“The Future of Europe”

9 DECEMBER 2020

15.00 - 17.30 HRS.

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**, Metropolitan 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

Interpretation: English, French, German

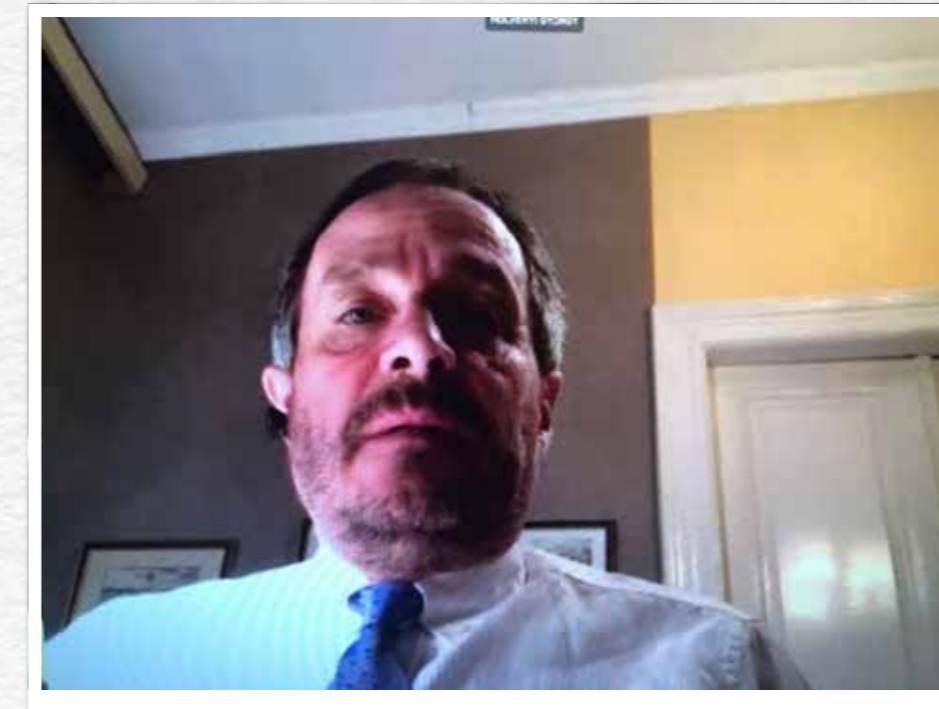
INTERVENTIONS

INTRODUCTORY MESSAGES



Jan Olbrycht MEP, Co-Chair of the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Working Group

Together with my Co-Chair Mr. Hölvényi, I welcome you to our annual Intercultural and Religious Dialogue meeting which we have once a year with churches and religious institutions. Our conference, of course is organised in a different way due to the pandemic. Today, our dialogue is concentrated on the debate about the future of Europe, which is a big challenge because we are in the time of the continuing process of Brexit and the difficult time of the pandemic and we decided to discuss how the churches and religious communities see the debate about the future of Europe. I think this is the time we like to declare that this dialogue of the EPP Group will be a part of the conference on the Future of Europe, which will start soon. I give now the floor to my Co-Chair György Hölvényi.



György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chair of the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Working Group

Your Excellencies,
dear Vice-President Ms Metsola,
dear Chairman Mr Weber,
distinguished Guests,

This year's Annual Dialogue conference is taking place under truly extraordinary circumstances. I warmly welcome everyone who has undertaken to think together, even in this virtual form. I believe that our tradition must be continued in this online form as well, as our EPP Group Annual Dialogue event has been taken place for 23 years now.

Especially in today's world and the current political situation, our goal cannot be less than to become exclamation marks when we talk about the future of Europe. I do not speak only about ourselves with my dear friend and Co-Chair Jan Olbrycht and my fellow Members. I speak about you, religious representatives, who represent millions of people as spiritual leaders. My sincere thanks therefore to all our high-ranking guests for their participation.

My impression is that the pandemic and its 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. Supported by thousands of years of experience from churches and religious communities, Europe desperately needs to re-invent itself for the 21st century.

I am proud to be able to assist your work as a politician. And I am proud to belong to a political Group where many fellow colleagues understand this challenge and consider it as crucial.

WELCOME MESSAGES



Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group

Thank you for organising this event even at these difficult times during the corona pandemic. We believe direct dialogue with religious communities is essential even at these times. The whole Group supports these activities and is committed to this dialogue. The Covid-19 crisis has had a great impact on the health sector, the economy but also on societies for the way how we live together. Loneliness is growing in Europe as we are doing less things together. When I go to the service of my Catholic Church in Bavaria it is a totally different situation compared to a year ago. We need to rebuild communities and our religious communities and especially engage the young generation in religious activities.

The title of the conference today is to concentrate on the Future of Europe; the conference will hopefully start in the upcoming weeks. We have to look at the common ground in Europe, the identity. The last decades were about peace and unity, now it is about the European way of life, to defend and promote it in the globalised world. We have to consider as a second point how to manage times of fundamental changes, and that should not be crisis driven but solution driven that means politics and civil society need an ambitious approach for the future and not a reactive approach. I want to share with you an ethical question on the broader perspective of health. In eastern Europe the people have 40% less chance to survive through cancer than in the west of Europe and that is a fundamental problem. Finally, relating to Fratelli Tutti, it gives us a clear indication about the long-term and global perspective; the headline is that nobody can solve problems alone, we need to work together as a global community to find common solutions and for us as Europeans it means we need to look for an ambitious climate policy and to look for a new partnership with Africa such as for the upcoming Covid-19 vaccination.



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)

I want to thank the organisers, dear Jan, dear György, for their invitation to the 23rd annual EPP Group Intercultural Dialogue with churches and religious institutions on the future of Europe.

I also welcome our Chairman, Manfred Weber and Paulo Rangel, Vice-Chairman and Chair of the Working Group on the Future of Europe.

Dear colleagues, dear friends, it is an honour for me to be able to share with you these first words of introduction to this very timely and relevant issue. Not very often in the past has the question of the future of Europe been so present in the political debate.

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 in France and Austria have reminded us of the urgency we need to tackle extremism and radicalisation and the crucial role played by religious and secular leaders in tackling this scourge on our society.

To face these challenges, we need to put the future back on our agenda. As Pope Francis wrote in His letter on Europe: "you, who for centuries have been a seedbed of high ideals and now seem to be losing your élan, do not be content to regard your past as an album of memories."

During this crisis, at first, we witnessed an uncoordinated rush to respond, but we also saw powerful images of concrete solidarity: Romanian doctors flying to Italy, Covid patients transported across borders for treatment. This is what citizens expect from Europe, concrete solidarity.

To make sure that we meet their expectations, we need to reinforce our dialogue with the European civil society. Churches, religious and philosophical organisations are a vivid part of European society across borders. They are European by essence. They have always been actors of solidarity.

Therefore, what they, what you, have to say about the future of Europe is of great importance, because they are rooted in our cities, in our countries, and they look up to transcendental values that push us to act for a more human Europe at the service of its citizens and the world.

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.

We must take a strong stand against anti-Semitism, racism, islamophobia and any hatred everywhere. We must stand up for all the Christians persecuted around the globe today and defend freedom of religion and belief in all its forms.

I am determined to use my role to help you push this issue forward. I am at your disposal.

Unfortunately, I need to attend a meeting of the Bureau but leave you in the hands of Jan and György, and my office will listen in to the discussions.



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

I would like to thank the Co-Chairs, Jan Olbrycht and György Hölvényi and also to salute my Chair, Mr. Manfred Weber and our new Vice-President of the Parliament, Ms Roberta Metsola.

I am really interested in following this debate because I am just finishing, together with a team, a first draft for a more deeply discussion about the positions of the EPP Group in the Future of Europe conference. Let me make only two or three considerations that you probably can reflect upon:

First of all, it is crucial to underline that the center of the debate of the Future of Europe is human dignity and human rights. These are the most important religious contributions and, specially, Christians' contributions but, naturally, Islam and Jewish religions are also centered in the dignity of human beings of men and women, and we have to work on this.

There are some fields where the modern projection of the impact of old values and roots of our religious beliefs are very important. One of them is technology, innovation and digitalisation. We are totally in favour of technological development but with full respect for human dignity. This is something that we should keep at the centre of our concerns because there will be temptations from some political forces and from some part of the public opinion. Even some scientific lobbies that are very respectful, will try to create, in a certain way, some damage to these values that are holy for us.

The second issue is really the environment and ecological approach. Nothing is closer to our views than this idea that there is a creation that we are not only responsible for in our lives, but something that is transcendent to us exists and gives us sense and humanity to our condition. The contribution of Pope Francis with *Laudato si'* (the second encyclical) was very important, to give the Franciscan approach, it is a interreligious one, as you know from exercises of Pope John Paul II in Assisi. So this ecological approach will be really crucial.

And the third domain is really the health issue which is something new as was raised with this pandemic. It gives us the opportunity to create a more social and solidaric Europe because the social issues are very important in the Member States and Fratelli tutti (the third encyclical), also from Pope Francis, will play a role.

So these are the three domains, technology and innovation, nature and environment, and health where Christian and religious values can be very influential. We should put our pressure and our influence in order to grant that these values will be considered in the solutions that the Future of Europe conference will address.

And to end my contribution, I would say that it is very important to grant the role of churches, the role of religions in the public sphere. We should be much in favour of separation between State and Church, between political sphere and the religion. This important principle should not be used to hinder churches to have their own public role. In this respect, I would like to mention that the German model of the constitution Grundgesetz (Basic Law) in 1949 meaning the ground rules, the fundamental rules, of the law it is a very good one because it is clear that there is no confession, that it is a public one. It states that religions and churches, the different confessions, they have a public role, to work, to develop and to assume in the public sphere.

I would like to underline this aspect because I am afraid that it could be a kind of temptation of trying to avoid the role of churches and the role of religion. It will be again in some of the narrative of the political forces and some of the NGOs that want to influence the final result of this conference of the Future of Europe. Freedom of religion is not a confessional status or a confessional political sphere but freedom of religion allows and gives the rights to the public partners in political constitution and social life. This is something that we should bear in mind and that I will fight for this recognition of your role, our role.

I look forward to the discussions and valuable insights and contributions. Thank you very much for your attention and I would like to thank again Jan Olbrycht and György Hölvényi who have made this work for years a big success among the EPP Group but not only, even out of our Group. This interreligious dialogue has a lot of impact and I would like to thank both very much for their work.

Session I: The position of Churches and Religious Communities concerning Europe's future

INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE BY GYÖRGY HÖLVÉNYI MEP



György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chair of the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Working Group

Your Excellencies,
dear Guests,

As I said in my introduction, our responsibility as politicians at the European Parliament is becoming more and more pressing. At the same time, we perceive this less and less at current times. This is a responsibility not only for Europe, but also for the religious freedom of Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, and also their persecution outside of Europe.

For a variety of reasons, we in Europe bear certainly a primary responsibility for the religious freedom of Christian and Jewish communities in any place of the world. It remains my personal conviction that this is true even if shockingly enough, this is understood by only a minority in the European Parliament today.

Every time we discuss Europe, we experience a long-time political line which would ultimately erase the past. We all heard it in The Communist Internationale:

“We’ll change henceforth the old tradition!”

We all know that this has already caused and will cause enormous damage. The European future cannot be built without the spiritual knowledge of the past. It can not exist without this wisdom, be it a Talmudic or a Christian tradition, and without reflecting on them.

We have a huge shared responsibility to communicate this heritage in an appropriate form. We must do it in a way that is understandable to the millions of European citizens who have been torn apart from their past and have no religious knowledge.

At first glance, this is a communication issue. But your denominations have become accustomed for centuries and millennia to the circumstance that you thematize the topics regarding religious and general moral life of Europe.

With your definitions and terminology, Europe used these values until the 18th century. This has changed fundamentally in recent centuries and decades. It is not anymore the different churches that thematize public discourse, but they must rather think in a so-called secular wording. This is far more than a technical issue. It is about addressing people and the possibility of dialogue with them. This is a dramatic challenge in today's global world of media.

Actually, we gathered for this event today to demonstrate for everyone that each of us takes responsibility beyond the own political or ecclesial community. Each of us stands also for the future of the society, country, region and continent where we live. This responsibility should characterise us today. In this spirit shall we perform our work today.

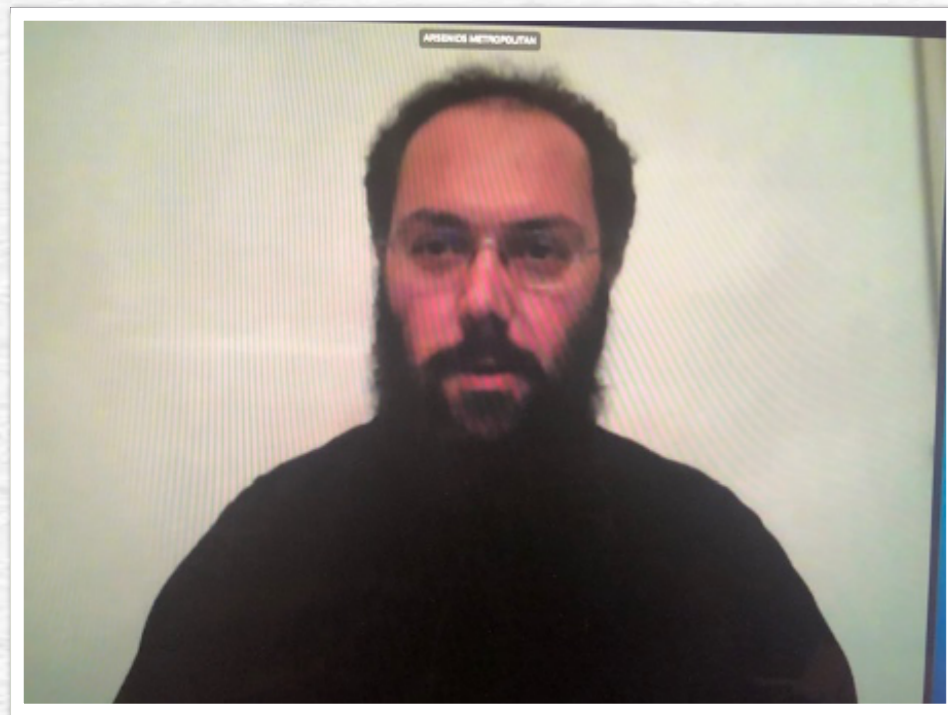
INTERVENTIONS OF GUESTS



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

In Tripoli, Lebanon, for centuries we are experiencing the encounter between religions and cultures. In the present of Europe, we cannot not talk about the Covid-19 situation. We felt as one because of the pandemic, the human solidarity, the spiritual solidarity, although we experience also the fear from others. I am very worried about the fear, also in Greek the word xenophobia which means fear of others, which is not just related to Covid-19 but also to the political, social and economic situation of Europe. The consequences of the pandemic have taught us how to rethink the way of life. 2020 is an opportunity to rethink the way of life, rediscover our personal and social life, the Christian rules, the cultural rules the values of Europe.

Europe is facing many challenges today: one of these is the political challenge, inside the continent and outside such as the severe problems in the Middle East. The religious and cultural challenge is very important today, migrants and asylum seekers are coming to Europe and it will change the demographic, religious, and social situation. What the church should do is to return to the main value of the EU, which is diversity and unity. To start educating the new generation to accept others and their differences and not to fear them. The role of religious institutions is to build reconciliation and spread peace in the face of God. Our position today should not continue in fear (xenophobia) but we should accept others. Europe is called to send the message of peace and to say that no solutions outside dialogue and peace, no solutions outside the value of freedom of religion and conscience, no solution outside real democracy because the purpose is human dignity, We all work together for the purpose of common good, and the human dignity of each person. We are called to be reasonably open, balanced and to put an end to the kind of ghetto (social, psychological, demographic) because the ghetto was the source of problems such as fundamentalism and sometimes terrorism. The social cohesion, the openness to others, to know each other's religion, all these values require education. To educate at school, at home, at our social and religious structures that others should not be a source of fear but richness in social life. We can read what Pope Francis taught starting from the encyclical that we are all brothers and sisters and have a new social life, a new environmental life based on peace and choice of dialogue.



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

Mesdames et Messieurs les Eurodéputés,
Chers amis,

Permettez-moi, avant de vous offrir ces quelques réflexions, de saluer chacune et chacun d'entre vous aujourd'hui, et de vous remercier de cette invitation à prendre la parole devant cette auguste assemblée.

Le thème qui nous réunit aujourd'hui est important, pour ne pas dire essentiel tant la place des religions est consubstantielle au grand projet européen, et ce dès le lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. En effet, l'Europe est sans cesse confrontée à la question de sa définition et de ses limites. Or, elle est en perpétuelle métamorphose. Sa réalité est inédite. Unifiée économiquement, organisée autour de plusieurs pôles et gérée par une communauté de nations qui travaille constamment à se définir en tant qu'ensemble de valeurs, l'Europe est invitée à découvrir une nouvelle voie qui lui permettra de faire face aux défis d'aujourd'hui, de l'inégalité générationnelle à l'inégalité géographique, des tentations de l'exclusion à l'hégémonisme, du populisme au délitement de la promesse européenne. Certainement, la pandémie de Coronavirus a aussi accentué les terribles inégalités à toutes les échelles aussi bien locale, nationale que régionale et a ébranlé la liberté religieuse en Europe jusqu'à ses fondements.

Face à ces défis, quelle devrait être la position des Églises et communautés religieuses concernant l'avenir de l'Europe? Comment pourraient-elles faire bon usage de leur précieux héritage spirituel et moral, de leur profonde connaissance anthropologique et de leurs traditions philanthropiques ?

Au cours des dernières décennies, nous avons assisté à une réévaluation du rôle de la religion pour l'existence humaine. Ce n'est pas un hasard si, de nos jours, le discours sur l'ère «post-religieuse» à venir a été remplacé par le discours sur «période post-laïque», dans laquelle les religions revendiquent et jouent un rôle public de premier plan et rejoignent tous les efforts remarquables de l'humanité. La question principale

aujourd'hui n'est pas de savoir quand la religion disparaîtra complètement des projecteurs de l'histoire, mais combien de temps il faudra pour survivre dans une société complètement coupée de ses racines religieuses. La tentative moderne de fonder une société sur des principes athées ou indifférents à la religion a échoué. La religion reste une dimension centrale de la vie humaine, tant au niveau personnel que social. Sans référence à la religion, il est impossible de comprendre le passé, d'analyser le présent ou d'imaginer l'avenir de l'humanité.

L'Europe, malgré ses difficultés, que nous connaissons tous, malgré les crispations identitaires qui ne l'ont jamais totalement quittée, l'Europe est et demeure le prototype d'un projet politique, économique et social contribuant à la réconciliation et donc à la paix. Devant les reconfigurations contemporaines du monde, l'Europe rend compte de la possibilité d'une région certes sous tension, mais sans guerre, et surtout chérissant la paix. La religion et la foi ont un rôle central à jouer. Jacques Delors n'y voyait-il d'ailleurs pas « l'âme de l'Europe » ?

Cependant, le fait religieux est trop souvent utilisé pour diviser. Malheureusement, l'explosion continue du fondamentalisme religieux et les terribles actes de violence au nom de Dieu et de la religion donnent des arguments contre les religions et soutiennent l'identification de la religion avec ses aspects négatifs. J'aimerais dire ici qu'il ne s'agit pas tant d'une question religieuse en tant que telle que d'une question de représentation, c'est-à-dire de l'emploi de la dimension religieuse pour se définir, et en se définissant pour se distinguer de l'autre, ce qui produit des phénomènes allant jusqu'à la sacralisation de multiples aspects de l'identité et notamment des identités nationales. Les appellations politiques prennent une dimension sacrée. Les discours nationaux sont autant de catéchismes. Les lieux de mémoires deviennent des chapelles. Le pluralisme religieux sur lequel s'appuient les relations entre les différentes traditions spirituelles rend parfaitement compte de ces difficultés. Les mémoires sont encore porteuses des douloureuses cicatrices de l'histoire. L'Union européenne joue alors un rôle déterminant. Il convient en effet de dépasser les thèses de Samuel Hun-

tington à propos du « choc des civilisations ». Penser l'intégration régionale des États doit donc être lié au traitement de l'interreligieux et de l'interculturel. Le contexte européen est un terreau devant faciliter cet objectif.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

L'Europe ne se conjugue qu'au futur. J'entends par là que si nous nous focalisons uniquement sur son passé nous risquons d'être paralysés par une forme de fascination malsaine et aveuglante qui pousse à l'enfermement et donc à la division. Ne considérer que le présent est aussi un danger pour le projet européen, un contentement de soi égoïste. En revanche, se projeter dans le futur, c'est embrasser à la fois le passé et le présent et offrir au monde ce que Claude Lévi-Strauss définit comme « le maximum de diversité » en parlant du dialogue.

La crédibilité des religions dépend donc largement de leur engagement en faveur de la paix, dont la voie est, à notre époque, le dialogue interreligieux et le témoignage commun face aux grands défis contemporains. Le dialogue est le moyen le plus efficace pour résoudre les problèmes et il favorise la confiance et l'acceptation mutuelle. Il constitue en tant que tel un geste de solidarité et une source de solidarité. Jamais dans l'histoire, les êtres humains n'ont eu l'occasion d'apporter autant de changements positifs à tant de personnes et à la communauté mondiale simplement par la rencontre et le dialogue. S'il est vrai que nous traversons une période de crise, il faut également souligner que les possibilités de communication et de coopération n'ont jamais été aussi grandes. L'humanité est appelée à réagir et à agir en collaboration, en œuvrant dans son ensemble pour notre présence et notre avenir communs. Personne - ni une nation, ni un État, ni la science et la technologie, ni une église ou une religion - ne peut faire face seul aux problèmes actuels. Nous avons besoin les uns des autres, nous avons besoin d'une mobilisation commune, d'efforts communs, d'objectifs communs, de religions qui ne trahissent pas la terre pour l'amour du ciel, le présent pour l'amour de l'avenir. Une véritable religion n'absout pas les humains

de leur responsabilité dans le monde et pour le monde. Au contraire, elle renforce leur engagement en faveur de la responsabilité et de l'action, tout en élargissant leur témoignage en faveur de la liberté, de la justice et de la paix.

Le rôle par excellence des religions dans l'écriture du futur de l'Europe est donc de faire la promotion du dialogue. Pour le dire plus directement, le futur de l'Europe réside dans sa capacité à faire la promotion du dialogue et notamment du dialogue interreligieux. Tous les responsables religieux sont ici pour faciliter ce processus, en s'inspirant notamment des travaux du Saint et Grand Concile de l'Église orthodoxe réuni en Crète en 2016 et qui déclare : « Le dialogue interreligieux franc contribue au développement d'une confiance mutuelle dans la promotion de la paix et de la réconciliation. L'Église lutte pour rendre plus tangible sur terre la « paix d'en-haut ». La véritable paix n'est pas obtenue par la force des armes, mais uniquement par l'amour qui « ne cherche pas son intérêt » (I Co 13, 5). Le baume de la foi doit servir à panser et à guérir les plaies anciennes d'autrui et non pas à raviver de nouveaux foyers de haine. »

Tel est à mon sens le rôle des églises et communautés religieuses dans le grand projet européen qui est le nôtre s'il veut continuer à se conjuguer au futur.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.



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

It is an honor and pleasure to be with you here today. I'm speaking with you today just before we start one of the most important Jewish holidays, which is one of the youngest Jewish holidays just over 2000 years old. The celebration of Hanukkah reminds us of a small Group of freedom fighters, named the Maccabees who fought for their religious freedom for their homeland in ancient Israel against the Greeks and rekindled the menorah which symbolises the eternal (light) connection between humanity and God. The reason why I mention this is that the holiday of Hanukkah connects to the discussion about the Future of Europe. In Jewish history oppression had its different forms, such as physical forms of oppression but also spiritual oppression such as in the story of Hanukkah where the Jews were oppressed in a spiritual way. What we learn from the story of Hanukkah is that oppression can not only be physical but also spiritual. If we have spiritual oppressions it is less visible but not less dangerous, this is a message we can all identify with when we speak about the present and future of Europe.

When we speak about the present and future of Europe the fundamental question is what gives the basis of this construction called the European Union. We tend to think that this is a social or economic construction, and we tend to forget about the individual diversity and historical diversity of individuals and communities that joined the EU. It is important to remember that all communities are made up by individuals and communities and the building process of a well organised union should be bottom-top and not top-down. Hanukkah reminds us the importance of our values and traditions which we would like to take from our European past into our European future. Here I must speak about the importance of preserving the Jewish traditions in the continent because in the past few years this has become something that needs more assurance than before. We can speak about both sides (physical and spiritual) of the dangers religious Jewish communities face today and the reason why I emphasize this is not just for the wellbeing of our communities, but because I believe the wellbeing of European Jews is the wellbeing of all European citizens. The last few years, there are not positive news about the present and future of European Jews. When we

speak about the physical dangers, we are facing an ever rising antisemitic assault on the continent, we are facing hundreds of physical assaults in all western European countries where there are large Jewish communities. I am sure you might remember the announcement of Felix Klein, the German commissioner for anti-Semitism, less than a year ago that he does not advise Jews wearing kippahs in the streets as this endangers them.

For Jews living in Europe today and for myself it is very fearing and endangering to hear that this is the physical state that we have to face today. In relation to the spiritual dangers, two countries attempted to ban Koche slaughter, in their country, practically making it impossible for Jewish communities to live in these countries. We are speaking about parts of Belgium and Poland. These attempts to ban Koche slaughters make the traditional Jewish communities' livelihood very hard. I strongly believe the Jewish communities have a very strong tradition in Europe and we should ensure that relating to the future of Europe all religious communities and traditions in all parts of Europe are physically and religiously safe. In relation to the holiday of Hanukkah which means inauguration also has a different meaning which is education. When we celebrate inauguration of the Jerusalem temple 2000 years ago, we celebrate also the importance of education. When we are speaking about the future of Europe, we speak about preserving the Judeo-Christian values of Europe and the rights of religious minorities and the freedom of religion and their safety. We must not forget that the most important tool we have is that of education as far as we don't forget that the EU is not made up just of 27 countries but hundreds of millions of citizens and schools. We need to think about school children and the future. Here I have to mention a project, an unbelievable project in Hungary by the Jewish community and the government which put together a working Group to go through the curriculum of the public schools to study and review how the Jewish history is represented.



Professor Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace International

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I do not speak with the same authority or knowledge as the previous distinguished eminences, I am a humble professor and I do serve a movement of multireligious leaders and institutions. It is with the heart of a professor that I wish to share a few points with you.

The first point I wish to share with you is that clearly, what the distinguished eminences already said in the framing, is that Europe has changed its composition, its nature. The face of Europe today is absolutely not what it was 20, 25 or 30 years ago. The homogeneous entity of the European constituency has been forever changed. There are multiple cultural and religious constituents who are legitimately European citizens. Many of whom if not all of whom, feel that this background of Europe is their country, their land and their very existence depends on it.

Given the sense of ownership by many across Europe who only 20, 25 years ago would not have been part of this rubric and escalating scope of European citizenship, I think we need to underline that there is no way that we can now contemplate a secular only framework of reference for everything European or anything that takes place within Europe. At least a considered sensitivity to the diversity of religious sentiments is not a luxury but an absolute necessity for Europe going forward. In addition, it is absolutely critical, not only to speak of the importance of religious sensitivity and sensibilities for policy and citizenship requirements but it is equally important to consider the criticality of multireligious collaboration and coexistence measures.

It means that we pay a tremendous tribute to the Orthodox Church, the Vatican, the Holy See, while many religious institutions stored long ago the importance of religious sensibility and sensitivities in the European and elsewhere context. It is today imperative that the European policy makers also seek those who are working together and who are prepared to work multireligiously. In other words, those who not only work within their own communities to represent their own communities, but are

ready, willing and able of collaborating across the religious spectrum, in spite of the religious differences, indeed, even because of the religious differences.

We should be aware of the religious dynamics since religion matters to most people, but I am arguing that it is absolutely essential for European policy makers to also pose a third question:

Which of these religious leaders, religious institutions and broad religious actors are already working together to foster social cohesion and social coexistence in European society?. Those religious actors who are willing to work together, who have a track record of working together for social coexistence, those will provide the most engaging, constructive and in many aspects, many progressive opinions and positions on human rights issues, which is precisely what the European policy makers need to look for.

I repeat, and I am underlining, it is not sufficient to simply be sensitive to religion and the role of religion. To me that is already old school, all those should happen at least a century ago. For European policymakers the question that has to be on the table today is how to collaborate with those, how can I listen, to those religious leaders, religious institutions and religious actors who have been working, not only dialoguing?. Dialoguing is extremely important, but working together to serve social cohesion in their respective communities across, regardless of the religious inclination. Those who have supported collaboratively the criticality of freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Europe and not only their respective community's rights but also other religions communities rights.

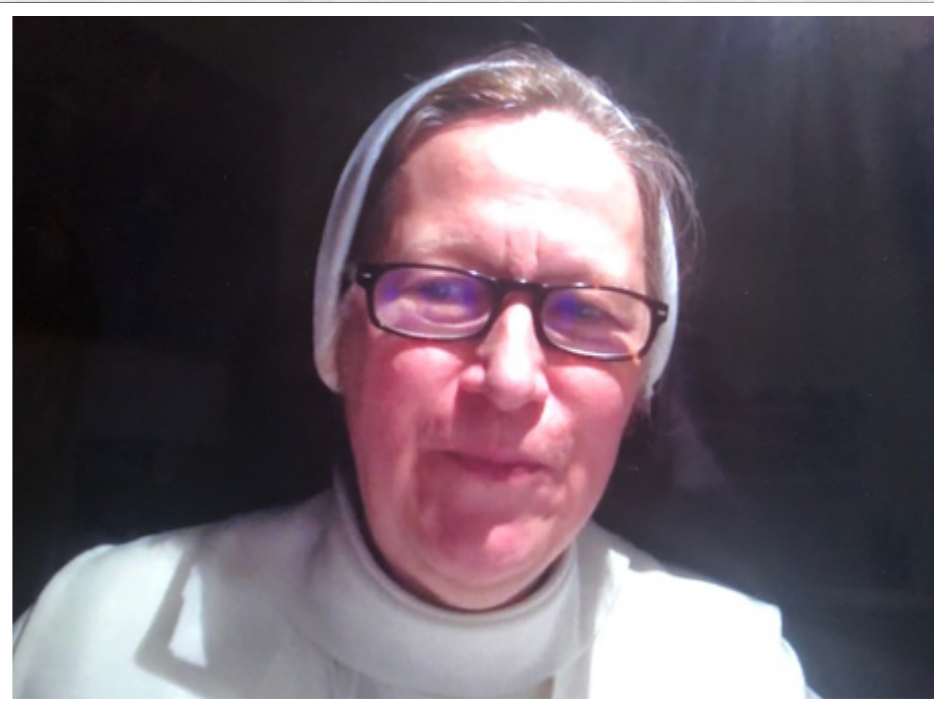
That is the test for policymakers, not only in Europe. But let's ensure that at least the Europeans can show that this is something that they are capable of doing. Again, religion is not a luxury for Europeans anymore, it is not a private matter. It is what determines how people think, believe and behave across their spectrum.

In order to honour Europe's remarkable legacy and history as the place, where nations and states have come together, it is important to also acknowledge that there is a legacy of those from elsewhere, now coming to become part of Europe. Those of them who are prepared to work together, who have a track record working together. They are not only an important source of information and guidance for social cohesion, they are also important sources and builders for European society and, by extension, European lawmakers and policymakers.

Furthermore, working together multireligiously is something that the Covid disaster has revealed to all of us to be a sore point. Religious actors are in the forefront and are the first responders in this humanitarian crisis today and we expect many more humanitarian crises, unfortunately, in the years to come, because we have not cared for our planet as a whole. If we expect many humanitarian crises, it behooves to the European decision makers and policy makers to appreciate and to support multireligious collaborative efforts as part of the vibrant society that Europe has always upheld and needs to continue to safeguard and uphold.

Session II: What do Churches and Religious Communities think of citizens' and faithfuls' expectations on the future of Europe

INTERVENTIONS OF GUESTS



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

Thank you very much, I think we can draw on two basic sources for these brief comments: survey data – which has the advantage of giving us representative results, but often can't tell us much about causality – and narratives, personal experience and case studies, that can make the survey data come alive, give us some insight into cause and effect and can inspire and motivate us to rise to the challenges we face.

First, then, some comments based on data drawn from Eurobarometer and the European Election Study.

Historical data shows that religious believers have generally supported the project of European unity more than non-believers (for a useful discussion, see Nelsen and Guth, 2005). There are differences between the levels of support between different communities but, as a whole, they have tended to be more supportive than those who do not profess a particular faith. If the communities of faith are declining in Europe, then, this would suggest that the future of Europe could be weakened, or even threatened, by the loss of this support. In other words, it would appear to be in the interest of the EU itself to support the communities of faith and their role in the European project. Studies show that, more recently, support amongst Catholics for the EU has been declining, and especially among the millennial generations (Nelsen and Guth, 2020). This should be worrying for EU leaders, since Catholics have historically been among the EU's strongest supporters. As the authors of this study say: "Roman Catholics on the European continent have been the core backers of integration since 1950. Those supporters are passing from the scene and with them goes the notion that European integration is a moral good. A 'sense of community'—a new identity—cannot be constructed on economic benefits alone. Will a secular com-

mitment to human rights, the rule of law and supranational institutions serve as an effective ideological substitute?. The evidence so far is not supportive."

Let me turn now to some thoughts based on personal experience.

First of all, I would say that the EU does not really connect very clearly to the lives of believers as believers. This is no doubt in large part due to the relationship between political structures and religious communities that has been established in the modern period and which is recognized and accepted by the Church. In his recent letter to Cardinal Parolin for the 40th anniversary of the founding of COMECE and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the European Union, the Pope talked about the need for a "healthy secularism, where God and Caesar remain distinct but not opposed". However, some actions, both on the part of the EU and the churches and religious communities, could help believers identify with the EU in a more active and healthy way. I am thinking, for instance, of the upcoming beatification of Robert Schuman. This would be an important moment for Catholics to see someone recognized as living a life of heroic virtue, a holy life, who spent himself for the cause of unity in Europe. I think we also need symbolic actions on the part of the EU in recognizing this beatification, to take the opportunity to emphasise the crucial role that believers like Schuman and the communities of faith in general have made and could make to the ongoing project of unity in Europe.

Secondly, religious believers are very active in the civil society sector. Their faith can be a strong source of motivation to them in committing themselves to the service of others. It can also drive them to be innovative. Caritas Europa, for instance, with its 2.5 million active participants across Europe, will run its first Innovation Festival in January 2021. Improved policy and legal funding structures that support the role of the institutions run by believers in the civil society sector would strengthen their positive impact and increase their support for the EU.

Thirdly, we currently have a very tense stand-off between parts of post-Communist Europe and the rest of Europe. We cannot go into it. What we can mention here is that often we do not understand enough about the background – history and memory – that motivate very different ways of behaving. These different ways can seem, feel and maybe also be, alien to both sides, quite apart from all the legal aspects which obviously receive the most attention. Insofar as these problems arise from memory, history, and the difficulties of building a common understanding and a sense of belonging to each other, an open dialogue in which people of faith on both sides play a major role could contribute significantly to a solution.

Finally, I want to end with an inspiring story. Shortly after the "Revolution of Dignity" I visited one of my former students in Kyiv, and we walked around the Maidan Square, still full makeshift buildings, among which were many improvised chapels – Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Latin – where monks, nuns and priests had prayed with the young people and supported them during their struggle. One of the Greek Catholic bishops told me something I will never forget: these young people who died, he said, they were the first people ever to lay down their lives for Europe.

I think this captures something of the potential for Europe of the communities of faith. On the one hand, the relationship between the European institutions and the faithful is coming under some stress and there needs to be some honest discussion and soul-searching on both sides about this. But, as we deal with all these problems – tensions between us, temptations to cynicism and so on - we should not forget the great gift we have been given in the institutions undergirding European unity. Young people in Ukraine died for the dream of being part of what we have. Let us never allow our dissatisfaction with where we are in Europe to overwhelm what should be our basic attitude: one of gratitude for what we have been given.

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

Dear friends, fellow citizens of Europe,

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak about the roles of churches and religious communities and European citizens vis-à-vis the future of Europe. I am speaking on behalf of the Conference of the European Churches with a Nordic perspective.

Churches are an established and long-term dialogue partner for the European Union – including the European Parliament. As the Conference will take place under involvement of European citizens, it is important to remember that churches in Europe represent through their members millions and millions of citizens throughout Europe. Churches are also deeply rooted in all EU Member States – from European and national to the local and regional level. That is why it is only natural that the expectations of the members of the churches vary from one corner of the continents to another – but this also puts the churches in a natural position to act as bridge-builders and to restore trust between countries, regions and people throughout Europe.

The global community and Europe as part of it, is facing at the moment multiple major changes. When people are moving – not just within their own countries or regions but between the continents, when the climate change and the biodiversity decrease, Covid-19 closes societies, people tend to seek simple explanations in order to cope with the rapid changes that create insecurity and fear. Simple explanations are fertile soil for polarization of societies, for fragmentation of communities, and for lack of solidarity. We are not just witnessing times of change but change of times, turn of an aeons. This is why we need every bridge builder, every peace maker and every community of hope and good will to plan and to build the future of Europe that is rooted in the values of human dignity, human rights, solidarity and democracy. It is our duty to encourage the faithful to stay firm with this approach.

If we look from the global perspective, we see that all the historical mainline churches have their roots in the European soil. Thus, Christianity has been influencing in shaping Europe during different phases and periods of history, be it the horrors of the Thirty Years War, or the success story of Nordic welfare societies.

The post-WWII times have been marked by strong cooperation between and among the churches in Europe. The Conference of the European Churches was born in 1956 to build bridges between churches and people in our continent divided at the time by the Iron Curtain. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Conference of European Churches has been supporting strongly the European integration process. The churches have been working closely together both with the European institutions and the actors of civil society to build more integrated, more democratic and more just Europe.

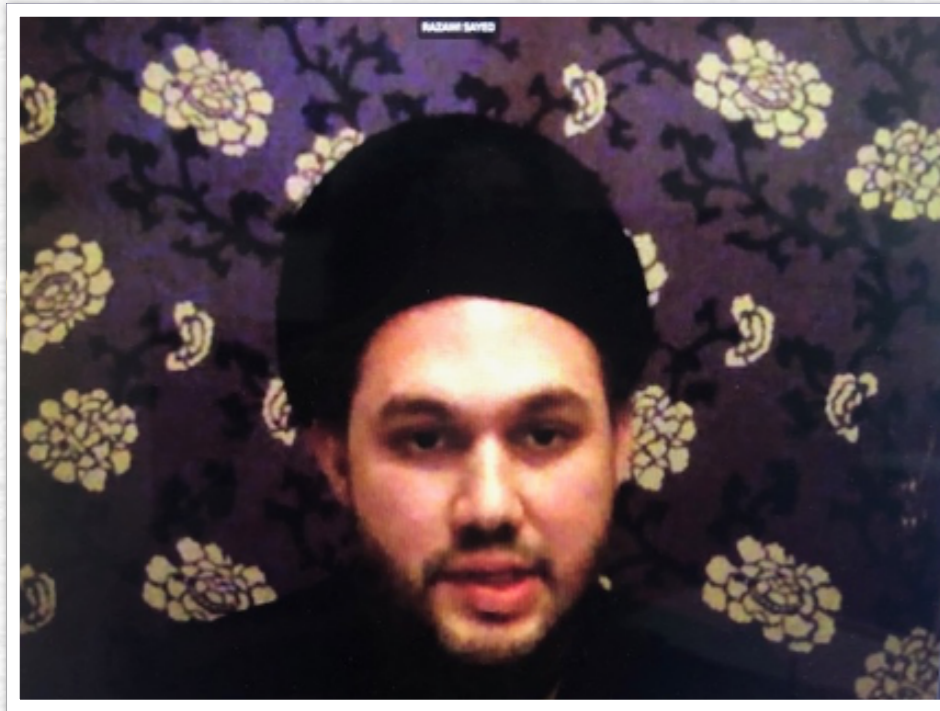
The particularity of churches in the European project has been to speak for, to clarify, and to stand for the European values. When we promote together undivided human rights, human dignity that belongs to all, democracy, justice, solidarity, peace, and the common good, we are actually promoting Christian values. For the churches these are not just values adopted from outside their lives or history, but values that are rooted deeply in the core of churches' own faith and theology, that is these are values part of churches' self-understanding.

But it is not just the Christian churches that play a crucial role in building the future of Europe that takes place under involvement of European citizens. More recently, cooperation between religious communities in Europe has become more and more important, as well as stronger. During the first two decades of this millennium, we have seen a growing number of antisemitic and anti-islamic acts, acts of hatred and violence, taken place in Europe.

The religious communities in Europe need to condemn these appalling developments together. But condemning is not enough. We also need to offer an alternative, a visible way to show that the religious communities themselves are working against the current of hate and build trust and hope for a joint future. This is why it is only good that the religious communities in Europe, representing Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities, have strengthened their cooperation. One of the very recent steps to do this is the formation of the Religions for Peace Europe, in process at the moment. This new interfaith body brings under one umbrella various separate European interfaith organizations and at the same time connects them to the global network of Religions for Peace.

The rise of the hate crime in Europe tells us that our collective memory is dauntingly brief. This is why it also reminds us that our common values, such as human dignity, human rights and democracy should not be taken for granted. Instead, we need to build democracy actively and in an inclusive way, we need to stand for dignity of every person and for undivided human rights, and this needs to take place in due solidarity and cooperation. The Conference of European Churches together with its Christian and interfaith partners have a strong commitment and experience in building inclusive, hospitable and diverse communities. This is why their role in building the future of Europe is a crucial one.

Churches have an important message and value to add to the discussion about the future of Europe, especially regarding values. Thus, the voice of churches needs to be heard and churches actively involved in the Conference on the Future of Europe.



Chief Imam Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi, Scottish Shia Muslim community

Thank you very much and you are very kind for that warm introduction. I would like to start by saying that it is extremely important that we are having this discussion today and that religions are also part of this discussion which really shows an inclusive Europe and hopefully this is the model that we are going to use to going for.

Europe has come a very long way and today we are more economically, politically and socially dependent of one another. The key aims of the European Commission coming together, that there would be no more wars after World War II and I think this is probably the longest stretch of time we have seen in modern history that Europe has not been at war conflicts. So we are achieving a lot of the things that we would like to achieve. There is also, at the same time, a European identity which is forming, and it is important to define what that actually means. In terms of languages we have multiple languages with a huge diversity of culture and this, instead of weakness, is the strength of us. The fact that we have multiple cultures and languages and by 2030 you will see that also the western part of the Balkans coming as well, not only more landmass but also, we will have much human resources, something to celebrate with. All those values and the European values are human dignity, democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, healthcare, equality and so forth. All these are entirely European standards and you have already raised these points. At the same time, there are such challenges that are going forward, challenges of artificial intelligence, climate crisis, migration crisis and recently, terrorism as well.

With Covid 19 a number of other challenges accelerates and these are some of the challenges that I would like to discuss before we can go forward to the solutions. There are two types, one as a general body and the second as a Muslim community living in Europe.

As you have heard from previous speakers, it seems to be a polarisation which is taken place. In the last couple of months, there is a rise of anti-Semitism, islamophobia and the exacerbation of the migration crisis. There are individuals that now are suffering because of closed borders due to the pandemic and are being pushed to increase

the rate of infection. There is a number of issues and Europe needs to really raise its standard to be able to tackle against, it is not the fault of Europe, it is a new crisis not been seen before.

On a micro level, in the Muslim community and speaking as representative of the community across Europe, I would say that probably 85% of practicing Muslims go to the Mosque, which includes woman who are veiled and men who are visibly Muslim. In a conducted survey, we have found that from that 85% of practicing Muslims that go to the Mosque 99% of them have felt victimization, either they have seen vandalization of Mosques, discrimination at the workplace or others. The language that has been used across Europe has literally led to polarisation of Groups of people and if we are to move forward to integrate, we have to really approach with a new strategy. We have seen the fourth-generation Muslims within Europe who feel very European, they have nowhere else to go, they are European, and they feel that they are contributing. In the last couple of months, the language which has been used is quite detrimental. When a language like that is used or takes place, it increases the polarisation and in a tight community, stops integrating. The most important thing here is integration and how we do that. There are examples present in the UK but can be used for other countries. We can look at the good practices of our Christians friends and how they are reaching out to the communities. The Conference of European Churches holds workshops, retreats and are joined by leaders, by Jews, by Muslims and they develop friendships. This is because they are using formalisation projects. There is help from the religious communities in terms of migration crisis which we are facing. We are seeing us through our faith advocating for one another.

During this Covid crisis, for example, I have seen in countries like Scotland, (which is actually very European) I have seen Jews, Christians and Muslims come together to help those people who are vulnerable, and this is phenomenal. Specially within a time we are going through economic austerity, a crisis in terms of economics. The religious communities have come and stepped up to help to overcoming this crisis.

We can empower the religious Groups who are promoting multi faith work, having workshops, bringing in youth and changing their mind frame. I think that the best and important thing is education. People need to meet people, we need to have trust in friendship in a person, therefore it will be easier to understand where they are coming from to secure their rights. The expectations, at least coming from our religious community, is representation, this is important. There is a lack of representation on the European level when it comes to Muslims and I think for wider faith communities as well.

Secondly, what is important is transparency and accountability. People are using inappropriate language. I remember a couple of years ago that people in the European Commission, without realising, were using xenophobic languages, especially when it comes to Muslims.

And thirdly, we can strengthen the local institutions to allow for minority Groups to work more with them so that we can overcome a full impact and it helps also with radicalisation problems as well.

Fourthly, what is important is the participation within the local civil society. I do have faith in Europe and I do have faith in the work coming together to have this discussion. We can work together to hopefully overcome those hurdles which may have come forward in the last couple of months. We can react now and overcome some of the language that has been used. Thank you very much.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

MEP OLBRYCHT

I would like to thank all the panelists. People from different churches are different, if we think about the future of Europe we should look for something that can integrate and unite us and find the common values that unite us. We have to agree what are our common values and decide if the European Union is a value for us, and create a space to be together and a space for dialogue to show what we have in common: values such as peace, dignity, solidarity etc. Dialogue is to find the way to be together even with the differences we have.

MEP HÖLVENYI

Dear Guests,

Thank you for the deeply enriching exchange of views. All that we could hear today must be turned from plan into reality. It must become a best practice and the basis for our further work in our different capacities.

Now we have talked about the future. But at the next occasions, at our interreligious seminars, conferences, breakfast meetings and Annual Dialogues we will have to report on the actual results. Therefore, it is also important that everyone receives the statements and speeches of this exchange in a very simple but more complete form.

Sincere thanks for all your interventions and see you hopefully in person next time!



Romain Strasser, Head of the Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit and **Nora Kramer**, Assistant, Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit

VADEMECUM OF THE SPEAKERS



BIOGRAPHIES

GYÖRGY HÖLVÉNYI MEP

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



Born in 1962, Hungary. Graduated in Hungarian Literature and History from the Eötvös Lóránd University's Teacher Training College, and in Economics and Tourism from the College of Tourism and Economics. Secretary of State for Relations with Churches, National Minorities and Civil Society, 2012- 2014. Secretary-General of the Robert Schuman Foundation, 2009. Advisor on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue in the EPP Group Secretariat, 2009-2012, and Press Advisor, 2003-2009. Head of President's Cabinet Office, Duna Television Broadcasting Co, 2000-2003. Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 1999. Director for Tourism, Tihany Municipality and Tihany Benedictine Abbey, 1996-1999. Press Secretary of the Budapest Group, Christian Democratic Party, Head of Foreign Affairs Department, 1994-1996. Head of Department, Ministry of Welfare, Parliamentary Secretariat, 1991-1994. Teacher, Szent-Györgyi Albert Elementary School, 1990-1991. MEP since 2014.

JAN OLBRYCHT MEP

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



Born on 21 September 1952 in Rybnik (Poland), Jan Olbrycht is a Doctor of Sociology, lecturer, expert, politician and social activist. He chaired the Polish Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 1990-1998. From 2000-2004, he was a Member of the Management Board of the Assembly of European Regions and a Member of the National Council for Regional Policy. In this current ninth term of the European Parliament (2019-2024), Jan Olbrycht is Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group and sits on the Budgets Committee and is a Substitute Member of the Regional Development Committee. In addition, he is the EPP Group Vice-Coordinator in the Budgets Committee and the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). He is also a founder, Member and President of the URBAN InterGroup in the European Parliament. Moreover, he is a Member of the Delegation for relations with Canada and a Substitute Member of the Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee. MEP since 2004.

MANFRED WEBER MEP**Chairman of the EPP Group**

Manfred Weber was born in Niederhatzkofen (Bavaria), in 1972, the second of three brothers. After leaving secondary school in 1990, he served his military service in Neuburg an der Donau. Manfred graduated in physical engineering from the Munich University of Applied Sciences in 1996 and married in 2002. After obtaining his degree in physical engineering, he worked as a self-employed engineer before starting up two companies. Manfred Weber started testing the political waters at the early age of 16, becoming a member of the Junge Union and the Christian Social

Union (CSU) in 1989. From 2003 to 2007, he led the Junge Union Bavaria as Regional Chairman. Aged 29, Manfred Weber became the youngest Member of the Bavarian State Parliament in 2002, resigning in 2004 on being elected a Member of the European Parliament. He has been a member of the CSU Party Presidency since 2009 and Vice-President of the CSU Party since 2015. He was also Chairman of the Committee for the future of the CSU from 2009 to 2015 and also chaired the CSU party in his homeland district, Niederbayern, from 2008 to 2016. Besides his professional and political activities, Manfred Weber has been a member of the central committee of Catholics in Germany since November 2016 and is also a member of the regional committee of Catholics in Bavaria. He was elected to the European Parliament in 2004 and has since sat on the Committees on Constitutional Affairs, on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, and on Regional Development. In 2008, as Rapporteur, he negotiated the European Parliament Directive on common standards and procedures in the Member States for returning third-country nationals staying illegally – the first Home Affairs Directive to be adopted through the ordinary legislative procedure. From 2006 to 2009, Manfred Weber was Spokesman on Home Affairs for the EPP-ED Group, as the EPP Group was known at the time. He has

been a Member of the EPP Group Bureau since 2006 and was elected Vice-Chair of the EPP Group after the 2009 European elections, before becoming Chair in 2014.

ROBERTA METSOLA MEP**First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Responsible for the Parliament's dialogue with churches, religions and non-confessional organisations**

Roberta Metsola was first elected to the European Parliament in 2013, becoming one of Malta's first female Members of the European Parliament. She was re-elected as an MEP with a record amount of votes for a female candidate in 2014. Professionally she is a lawyer who has specialised in European law and politics. Dr Metsola served within the Permanent Representation of Malta to the European Union from 2004 to 2012 as Malta's Legal and Judicial Cooperation Attaché and Head of the Justice and Home Affairs Unit there. Following that, she joined the team of the High Representative of the European Union

for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, as a legal advisor. She left that role to fill the vacant seat of current Opposition Leader in Malta, Simon Busuttil, as an MEP. In her student years, she was highly active in various organisations, acting as the Secretary-General for the European Democrat Student organisation between 2002-2003. Born in 1979, Roberta Metsola is married to Ukko Metsola and is the mother of three young boys. She graduated from the University of Malta and the College of Europe in Bruges.

PAULO RANGEL MEP**Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group and Chair of the Working Group on the Future of Europe**

Born in 1968, Porto, Portugal. EPP Vice Chairman since 2015 responsible for the Membership Working Group III mandated to promote, facilitate and incorporate new EPP members, associate members, and observers throughout the continent. Since 2016, EPP chair of the Ethics Committee that wrote the Code of Conduct and the Internal regulations approved in the 14th October 2019 Political Assembly. Member of the European Parliament and Vice Chairman of the EPP Group since 2009. EPP Group Vice Chairman responsible for the Future of Europe (since 2019); Chairman of the European Ideas Network (EIN),

a centre-right pan-European think-tank with an active membership of around 3000 policy-makers and opinion-shapers across the European Union (2014-2019); Vice Chairman responsible for the relations with National Parliaments (2009-2014). Head of the PSD Portuguese delegation in the European Parliament and Administrator of the Robert Schuman Foundation since 2009. Chairman of the PSD parliamentary Group in 2008-2009, and member of the Portuguese Parliament during the 10th legislature. Secretary of State, Deputy of the Minister of Justice under the 16th government (2004-2005). Guest Lecturer in the Law Faculty of the Portuguese Catholic University – Porto School (Political Science; Theory of Constitution). Guest Lecturer of the MBA (Power and Influence) and of International Economy Post-Graduation (Geopolitics) in the Porto Business School – University of Oporto. Graduate of the Faculty of Law, Portuguese Catholic University of Porto. Between 1994-2005, lawyer and partner of law firm “Castro, Pinho, Peres e Xavier” in Oporto Office; between 2006-2016, lawyer and partner of law firm “Cuatrecasas, Gonçalves Pereira” in Oporto Office. Member of the board of directors of the Porto Trade Association, chairman of the General Assembly of RAR Group and regular commentator

in various branches of the media (tv, radio and newspapers). Publications: many speeches and lectures, scholarly articles and books on legal, political and constitutional issues, including *Repensar o Poder Judicial*, *Publicações Universidade Católica*, 2001, *O Estado do Estado*, D. Quixote, 2009. Research work: with the DAAD in Frankfurt, with the European Institute in Florence, the University of Osnabrück, the University of Lausanne, the University of Bologna, the University of Genoa and the University of Freiburg. Awarded the *Grosses Verdienstkreuz mit Stern* by the Federal Republic of Germany (2009); the Council of Europe's *René Cassin Prize* (1989); the D. António Ferreira Gomes Prize (1986).

HE ARCHBISHOP YOUSSEF SOUEIF**Maronite Archbishop of the Maronite Catholic Archeparchy of Tripoli in Lebanon and former Archbishop of the Maronites in Cyprus**

Archbishop Soueif was born on 14th July 1962 in Chekka (Lebanon). He studied theology and philosophy at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik and was ordained priest on 5th September 1987. Following his PHD in oriental ecclesiastical studies at PIO-Rome in 1992, he started giving lectures in liturgy and published several scientific liturgical and pastoral works. In 1993 he was appointed secretary of the Patriarchal Liturgical commission and in the year 2000 he became vice-president of the same commission. From 1992 till 2008 he was the parish priest of

Chekka and Tripoli in Lebanon and since 2000 he was appointed the General Vicar of the Maronite Archdiocese of Tripoli Lebanon. He founded and directed different social and educational institutions. In March 2008 he was elected the president of the Sacerdotal League of Lebanon. The Holy Synod of the Maronite Church elected him as Archbishop of Cyprus for the Maronites

and on the 29th October, 2008 Pope Benedict XVI confirmed his election and on 6th December, 2008 the Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir ordained him Archbishop. On the 24th April, 2010 Pope Benedict XVI appointed him Special Secretary for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. Since April 2010 he is a member of COMECE. On 23 October 2010 he was appointed member of the Special Council for the Middle East by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI during the Thirteenth General Congregation. In 2012 he became the president of the Patriarchal Liturgical commission and in the same year Pope Benedict XVI appointed him member of the Executive Board of Caritas Internationalis. In June 2015 Pope Francis appointed him for a second mandate in the Executive Board of Caritas Internationalis. In 11 October 2018, His Holiness Pope Francis has appointed him, as Apostolic Visitor for Maronite faithful resident in Greece. On October 2020, the Maronite Holy Synod elected him as the Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli - Lebanon. Since 2000, he is a keynote speaker on Theological, Ecclesiastical and Social topics. In his pastoral task, he activates and promotes the Diaconia of Charity. Both in Lebanon and Cyprus, he launched many centres for Theological and Social formation for laity.

METROPOLITAN ARSENIOS KARDAMAKIS

Metropolis of Austria and Exarch of Central Europe, Ecumenical Patriarchate



His Eminence, the Metropolitan Arsenios (Greek Αρσένιος,) was born on October 31, 1973 in Heraklion, Crete. He graduated from high school and the ecclesiastical academy in Athens. After completing his studies in Orthodox theology in Athens and Thessaloniki, he continued to study Catholic theology at the University of Strasbourg in France. In 1998 he was ordained a deacon. He then carried out his first pastoral activities in Germany. In 2002 he was ordained a priest. In 2004 Dr. Kardamakis became

Vicar General of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of France and one year later, in 2005, Deputy Secretary of the World Council of Churches in France. On November 3, 2011 he was elected Metropolitan of Austria and Exarch of Hungary and Central Europe by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. He was ordained bishop on November 30th and initiated into office on December 4th, 2011 in Vienna.

CHIEF RABBI SLOMÓ KÖVES **Unified Israelite Congregation of Hungary (EMIH)**



Slomó Köves is the current Executive Rabbi of EMIH Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation, an affiliate of Chabad Lubavitch in Hungary, since its founding in 2004. Chairman of Action and Protection League. Köves graduated from the Yeshiva High School (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), the Institut Supérieur d'études Rabbiniques et Talmudiques and the Central Lubavitch Yeshivot (New York). He received a Ph. D. from the University of Debrecen, in history, in 2007. Köves took an active part in reorganizing the Statusquo Jewish community, which in 2004, elected him as the first executive rabbi of the Congregation.

In 2003 he founded – with help from many local civil activists – the Open University of Jewish Studies (Zsidó Tudományok Szabadegyeteme), an institution created to give Jewish education to adults wanting to learn traditional Jewish Studies. The Open University has been very active ever since its founding, and has attracted close to 3000 participants, over the course of 30 semesters all together. Between 2003 and 2009 he took part in publishing Haggada for Pesach, Siddur for Shabbat and many other classical Jewish books as an editor and translator. In 2010 he and his congregation garnered much local and international support to reopen the neglected

200 years old Grand Synagogue in Obuda. In 2012 he was ordained the chief Jewish chaplain of the Hungarian Defense Forces. In 2012 he initiated the foundation of the Action Protection League, NGO countering Antisemitism. In 2015 he founded the CEDEK social welfare organization. In 2017 he founded the bi-lingual Maimonides Jewish High School in Budapest.

PROF. AZZA KARAM

Secretary General of Religions for Peace International



Prof. Dr. Azza Karam serves as the Secretary General of Religions for Peace – the largest multi-religious leadership platform with 90 national and 6 regional Interreligious Councils. Azza Karam is a Professor of Religion and Development at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, in The Netherlands – of which she is a citizen. She has served as a Senior Advisor on Culture, at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) since 2007; and as Coordinator/Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development; where she coordinated engagement with members of a Global Interfaith Network for

Population and Development with over 600 faith-based organizations from all regions of the world, representing all religions and interreligious affiliations. She was the Lead Facilitator for the United Nations' Strategic Learning Exchanges on Religion, Development and Diplomacy, building on a legacy of serving as a trainer cum facilitator of inter-cultural leadership and management in the Arab region as well as Europe and Central Asia. She served as the President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations in 2003, and has supported the founding of numerous interreligious networks including the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI – 2013), the Moral Imperative (2015) and the International

Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD – 2016). She is also a member of the Trans-Atlantic Partnership for Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD). Professor Karam has served in different positions in the United Nations since 2004, as well as other intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations since the early 1990s, such as International IDEA, the OSCE, and Religions for Peace (RfP). Simultaneously, she lectured in various academic institutions in Europe, in North America (including the United States Military Academy/West Point), Africa and the Middle East. Her Ph.D. in 1996, focused on Political Islam, and became her first book in Arabic (her mother tongue) and in English. She has since published widely, and in several languages, on international political dynamics, including democratization, human rights, peace and security, gender, religious engagement, and sustainable development. She was born in Egypt, and now lives in the United States.

SR. HELEN ALFORD O.P.

Member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and vice rector of the University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rome



The Reverend Sr Helen Alford, O.P., was born in London on 1 May 1964. She graduated in manufacturing engineering from the University of Cambridge, where she was also awarded a PhD. She is a religious sister of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Kwa-zulu Natal. She has taught subjects related to economic ethics and the history of Christian social thought in several universities. She has served as consultant to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. She is currently vice rector of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. She is the author of numerous publications on management theory and corporate social responsibility.

BISHOP KAISAMARI HINTIKKA**Diocese of Espoo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**

Bishop Kaisamari Hintikka is the third bishop of Espoo Diocese, which was founded in 2004. Kaisamari Hintikka was consecrated as bishop on 10th February 2019 in Espoo Cathedral. Doctor of Theology, University of Helsinki in 2001. Ordained on November 15, 2009 in the Diocese of Helsinki. In 2011-2018 she worked in Geneva, where she served from August 2012 as Director of the Department for Theology and Public Witness of the Lutheran World Federation and as Deputy Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs. Before moving to Switzerland, she worked as an executive secretary for the Finnish Lutheran Church's Foreign Affairs Department.

CHIEF IMAM SAYED ALI ABBAS RAZAWI**Scottish Shia Muslim community**

Imam Razawi is the Chief Imam and Director General of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society (SABS). He is also an associate and a director at the Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, as well as being a Visiting Scholar at the University of Strathclyde. Nationally, he has served as an advisor on the United Kingdom's Independent Sharia Review commissioned by Theresa May and participates as a member of the Oxfam GB Zakat Advisory Panel. He is also a trustee for Faith for the Climate. Internationally,

Chief Imam Razawi is a trustee and member of multiple international organizations and non-governmental bodies including an international Trustee of Religions for Peace (RfP), a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), a member of the United Nation (UN) Multi-Faith Advisory Council, and an advisory board member of the Islamic Reporting Initiative (IRI).

PRESS RELEASE

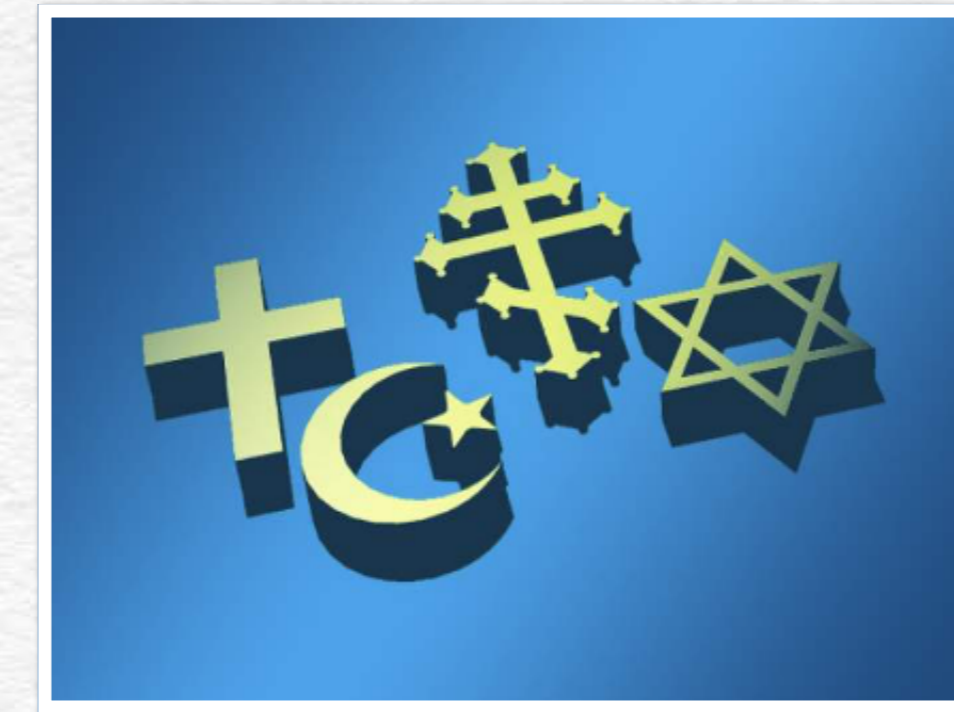


EPP GROUP PRESS RELEASE

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 long-standing, 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 Hólvényi 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.”

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