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INTERCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS Dialogue

The EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue activities 2014-2019



from left to right: **Jan Olbrycht MEP**, **Manfred Weber MEP** Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and **György Hölvényi MEP**

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

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.

WHAT WE DO:

Our concept is simple: we bring people together. No other political group in the European Parliament runs a similar permanent structure. The Lisbon Treaty's Article 17 lays down the legal basis for the dialogue and encourages politicians, religious leaders and experts to strive for more cooperation. We believe that dialogue opens doors

to greater understanding and can be a catalyst for building social cohesion. The ultimate goal of the EPP Group 'Intercultural and Religious Dialogue' is to assist in the important effort to pursue intercultural exchange, people to people dialogue, peace-building initiatives and the strengthening of social cohesion. The dialogue is a powerful tool to bring this about and the EPP Group is a key player in such exchanges.

OUR ACTIVITIES:

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



WE ORGANISE A WIDE RANGE OF EVENTS ON A REGULAR BASIS:

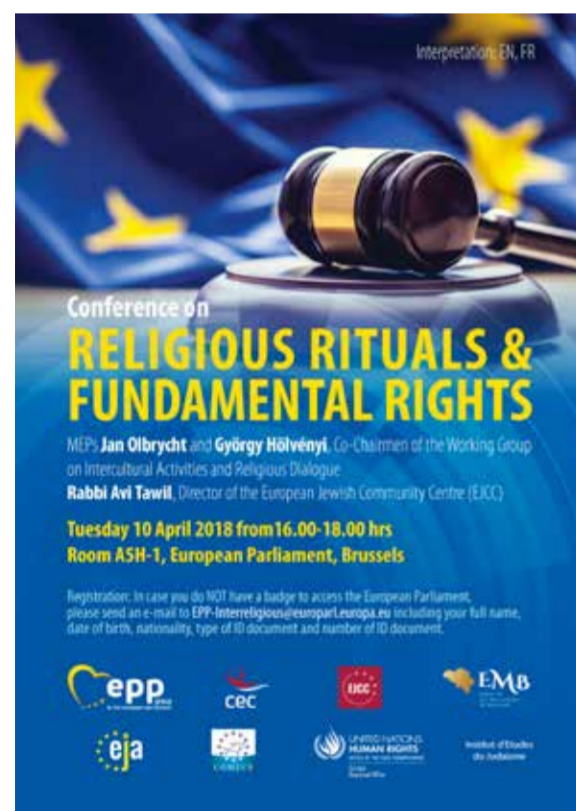
- › EPP Group Annual Dialogue with Religions and Cultures;
- › Monthly Working Group meetings;
- › Thematic Working Breakfasts with Ambassadors of Muslim (OIC) Countries;
- › Visits of religious leaders from the Middle East, Africa and Asia;
- › Conferences on current affairs related to religion (Religious radicalisation, Persecution of religious minorities);
- › Seminars on relevant topics with the participation of experts from EU and non-EU countries.

Seminar on the Importance of Europe to Protect Christian Cultural Heritage



Christian cultural heritage has a universal value for people and societies. Across Europe, there are hundreds of thousands of churches, the continent's biggest living museum of architecture, history and faith, which we should preserve as our cultural heritage and source of our identity. As 2018 was the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue held a seminar on 6 March in the European Parliament on the importance of Europe protecting Christian cultural heritage.

Conference on Religious Rituals & Fundamental Rights



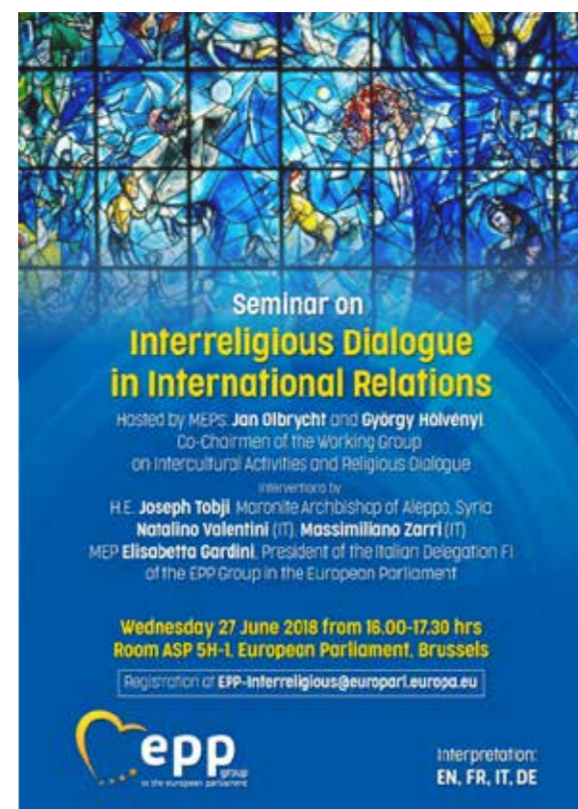
Freedom of religion, as a fundamental right, represents a central pillar of our society, and is the origin of manifold cultures, as we know them today. Despite this legacy, very often religion is portrayed or manipulated into something divisive by religious extremists and cynical opportunists. Religion acts as an identifier and promoter of the intrinsic shared values of life: respect of the other, the sanctity and a vision of a world that can and must achieve peace. Dialogue between cultures and differing ideologies is key for the social cohesion and the overall health of society.

Conference on Ukraine in Times of Independence



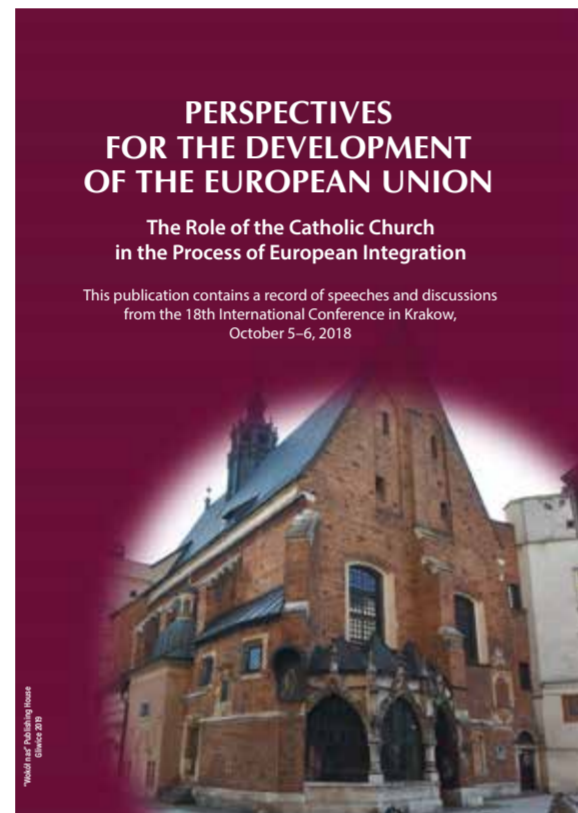
The Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, Patriarch Philaret, visited the European Institutions and held important meetings in the EP with President Tajani and EPP Group MEPs. Ukrainian Bishops and the Ukrainian Ambassador to the EU accompanied the Patriarch. The topic of the discussion was the difficult situation in Ukraine after the annexing of Crimea by Russian separatists.

Seminar on Interreligious Dialogue in International Relations



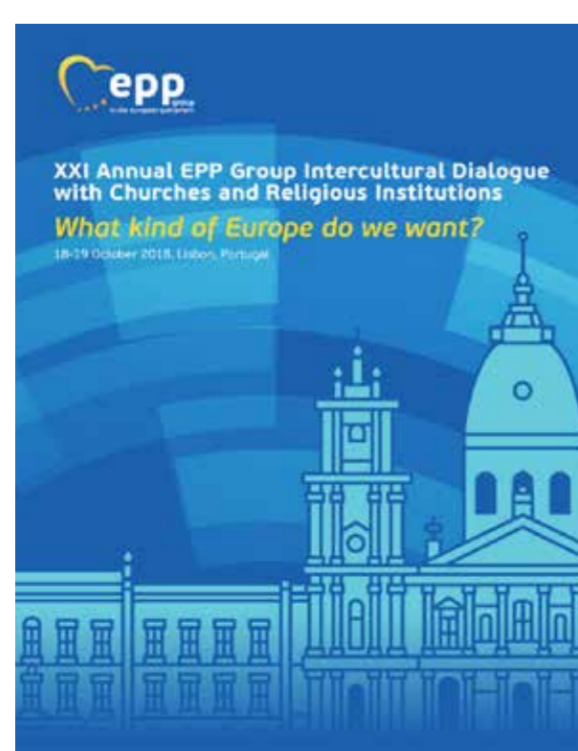
Conference with H.E. Joseph Tobij, Maronite Archbishop of Aleppo. The Archbishop explained the difficult situation faced by Christians in Aleppo. The city was destroyed: private and public buildings, hospitals and Churches were ruined. The food, water and medicine delivery was stopped by embargo. Foreign help was very difficult and poverty pervaded across the city. Now, the Archbishop is trying to raise funds to rebuild and renovate Churches, thus giving hope to the people.

XVIII International Conference in Krakow



In 2018, the International Conference was held under the title: "Perspectives for the development of the European Union". The programme of the two-day Conference included, above all, two essential speeches of prominent European politicians. By means of online connection, Antonio Tajani, the President of the European Parliament outlined the concept of prospective steps for the European Union's development after termination of the United Kingdom's membership. Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, presented the lecture entitled: "Perspectives for the development of Poland within the European Union", where he included his reflections after three years of holding one of the key offices in the EU structures, as well as the vision of the evolution of political situation in Europe, and the outside and inside threats faced by Europeans. The Conference brought together a number of politicians and also many journalists from Poland and other European countries, as well as international press agencies. As always, clerics were present among the participants and panellists, as well as several members of the Orthodox Church from Ukraine. During the two-day Conference, the International Cultural Centre in Krakow has been visited by around 30 speakers and panellists and over 450 attendees.

21st Annual EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue, Lisbon, 18-19 October



The EPP Group 21st Annual Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions took place in Lisbon (Mafra- Ericeira) from 18-19

October 2018. EPP Group MEPs, including Chairman Manfred Weber, religious leaders and academics discussed the role of religion in debates on the Future of Europe. As the 2019 European elections approach, this Dialogue Conference was an extremely relevant event.

The agenda was divided into three main sessions and it included important issues such as the role of religion in the debate on the Future of Europe, family, education and youth as a primary source of society's human, social, economic and spiritual capital, and promoting peace and security in Europe and in EU external policies. EPP Group MEPs underlined that Portugal, due to its geographical position as the most western country in Europe and to its centuries old global experience of evangelisation, is the right location to host and discuss issues related to Interreligious Dialogue.

Guest speakers included Rev. Olivier Poquillon, General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of the EU, Natan Peres, Rabbi of the Israeli Community of Lisbon, European and Portuguese politicians as well as intellectuals and academics. It was highlighted that, approaching the end of the current legislative period, the 2018 Dialogue offered the opportunity to overview how the EPP Group facilitated the visibility of the role of Churches and religious organisations during this Parliamentary term. It is high time to present all the achievements regarding Dialogue that the EPP Group carried out for religious freedom and beyond, and to define new directions for the future. It was furthermore pointed out that the significance of the debate on the Future of Europe foments dialogue between politicians, intellectuals, Churches and religious communities; this, participants agreed, is inevitable.

Religions and the culture of peace The Bologna' experience as European Value



Europe is increasingly multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious. The continent faces challenges posed by an evolving society, which sometimes expresses difficult and contradictory needs. Additionally, the last economic crisis and its consequences have also sharpened forms of incomprehension and rivalry between social classes as well as between different cultural expressions. In the city of Bologna, a unique model of dialogue was created in the frame of the Association "Abraham and Peace" to foster interreligious Dialogue and facilitate intercultural encounters. Msgr. Stefano Ottani, General Vicar of the Curia of the Archdiocese Bologna, talked about the initiatives undertaken by himself and the Curia, which have also seen the participation of the Jewish and Islamic communities, as Prof. Marina Marini and Yusuf Pisano explained it, together with the interventions of Beatrice Draghetti and Massimiliano Zarri.

Freedom of Religion and European Policy



Annual Report on 'Aid to the Church in Need' Presentation of the Religious Freedom in the World 2018 Report of the Pontifical Foundation

'Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)'. The report is ACN's comprehensive assessment of the threat to religious liberty today. More than 190 nations were examined with a special focus in each case on the place of religious freedom in constitutional and other statutory documents, incidents of note and a projection of likely trends. The focus of the report is concerned with state and non-state actors who restrict and deny religious expression, be it in public or in private, and who do so without due respect for others and for the rule of law.

2019

Today, Interreligious Dialogue belongs to the core identity of the EPP Group. No other political Group in the EP has this level of engagement. In its daily activities, the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit maintains contact with Churches and religious organisations, communities and NGO's, and has done so for more than 20 years. The objective is two-fold: to get to know the religious point of view on a number of policy areas, and to spread information about EPP Group policy initiatives. Intercultural and Religious Dialogue activities also aim to promote mutual understanding, a peaceful existence together and an active sense of European citizenship. Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty lays down the legal basis for such a dialogue and encourages us to strive for more cooperation. Interreligious Dialogue activities offer a historical perspective, with a timespan representing a third of the EU's history. The importance and relevance of such a dialogue increased enormously for Europe during the last two decades.

Film screening (première) of the movie: "White Right: Meeting the Enemy"



"When Deeyah Khan was six, her father took her to her first anti-racism rally. A Pakistani immigrant to Norway, he promised her that things would get better and that the skinhead gangs that terrorised their family and families like them would soon find themselves relics of past prejudices that bigotry belonged in history, that tomorrow would be a more tolerant time. Following the lauded jihad – in which she spoke to radicalised British Muslims who had fought in the name of jihad on the battlefields of Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Chechnya and now found themselves full of regret – Deeyah joins the frontline of the race wars in America. She sits face-to-face with fascists, racists and the proponents of the "alt-right" ideologies. Deeyah's need to find the deeper human causes of horrific social forces opens a different possibility for connection and solutions. Rather than dismiss these men as monsters, she is determined to discover the men behind the masks."

Presentations by Christian university students from the Middle East, Asia and Africa

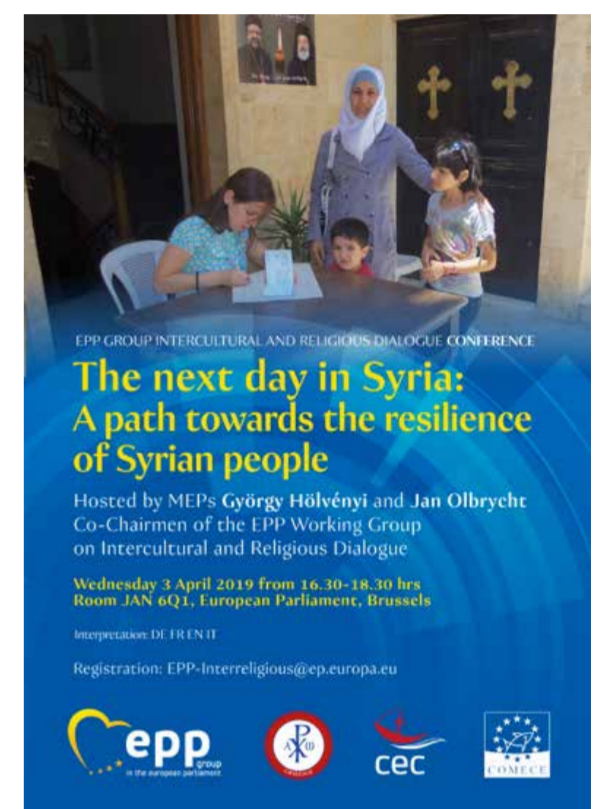
In 2017, the Government of Hungary launched the special programme "Scholarship for Christian Young People" to provide university scholarships for young people from Christian families from all over the world, in order to facilitate their access to high-quality university education. The "Scholarship for Christian Young People" programme provides university studies and full board in Hungary for Christian university students to enable them to use their European-level knowledge to help rebuild their countries, which have been ravaged by civil war or genocide, among others in Syria and Iraq. Apart from this, the programme focuses on several other regions of the Middle East, such as Egypt, Palestine or Lebanon, where an increasing interest for European higher education scholarships exist. The scholarship's most important goal is to enable Christians who are persecuted or suffer discrimination to remain in the land of their birth, and this is why it has also been extended to Nigeria, where terror group Boko Haram poses a danger to Christians. During their meetings in Brussels, the scholars present their unique testimonies on the situation

of Christianity in their countries of origin and their experiences on university studies in Hungary. In the 2018/19 academic year, 163 students began their studies from the following countries: Egypt, Lebanese republic, Republic of Iraq, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Republic of Kenya and Nigeria.

On the way of reconciliation and life in multi-ethnic society, Mostar and Medugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28-31 March 2019

The purpose of the visit was to meet with high-ranking Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish representatives as well as with representatives of NGO's, Civil society and Academia. The meetings were an occasion to better understand the current situation in the multi-ethnic society, more than 20 years after the War in the region.

The next day in Syria: A path towards the resilience of Syrian people



Christian Churches are concerned about the fate of Syrian people, and their future, and share the common understanding that the right to return and to come back to daily life should be made effective without further delay. Overall attention should be paid not only to short term-goals, but, to expand into long term-goals, including the reconstruction of the country (not only infrastructures, health care or education services but also economic life...) and ensuring a safe, "attractive" and viable environment for the returnees. In order to achieve this, stakeholders need to come up with practical solutions. The event was held, for the first time, in cooperation with the three most relevant and Brussels based organisations of the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Churches: CROCEU, COMECE and CEC. The aim of this seminar was to exchange views about the current situation of people in Syria and to reflect on possible solutions (incl. legal ones) to promote the future normalization of their lives. As, for a variety of reasons, humanitarian aid provided to Syria is not always reaching all its population, one of the major points of interest would be to find the best way to fairly distribute resources for the resilience of Syrian people.

GET INVOLVED:

Members of the EPP Group are encouraged to actively take part of the dialogue and suggest ideas that can be incorporated in the series of activities.

Please contact the office of the two Co-Chairmen of the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural Activities and Religious Dialogue:

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