Information Guide: Policies

Religion and Europe
The religious dimension within the EU and the wider Europe

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Religion and the EU

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European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Europe External Action Service – EU Relations with Holy See

EU Delegation to the Holy See

At a glance
September 2016

Dialogue of the EU institutions with religious and non-confessional organisations

Every year the European institutions hold dialogue sessions with churches, and with non-confessional and philosophical organisations. Based on Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE) the dialogue focuses on issues on the European agenda.

From ‘A Soul for Europe’ initiative to the Article 17 dialogue sessions

In 2006, Jacques Delors, then European Commission President, identified a need for European integration to go beyond purely economic and legal dimension, established the first formal links of the EU institutions with religious communities under the initiative ‘A Soul for Europe’. Structural dialogue with representatives of religions and humanist organisations began, with the aim of contributing to the spiritual and ethical perspectives of the EU, and promoting civil society participation in the integration process. A Reflection Group on the Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe was established in 2003 to reflect upon issues relating to values relevant for European unification. It led to the work of the Convention which drafted the EU Constitutional Treaty, which in turn set the ground for the eventual adoption and entry into force (in 2008) of the Treaty of Lisbon.

With (Article 17) TFUE introduced, for the first time, a legal basis for regular open and transparent dialogue between the EU institutions and churches, religious associations, and philosophical and non-confessional organisations. Article 17 also states that the EU shall respect the status of churches, religious organisations, and philosophical and non-confessional organisations, under national law in the Member States.

Dialogue partners
The EU institutions organise Article 17 TFUE dialogue sessions with representatives of religious organisations, notably CECOME (the EU Catholic bishops’ conference), the Council of European Churches (CEC) – including Protestants, Anglicans, Orthodox and Old Catholic churches), Muslim communities, the European Jewish Congress and alsolimited, 56th and liberal associations. Philosophical and non-confessional organisations participating in the dialogue include Humanist organisations based on the Belgian model, which must on the secular neutrality of the public sphere, freethinkers, and free thought, ethical or agnostic organisations.

EU guidelines on freedom of religion, freedom from religion
In 2013 the Commission published Global Implementation guidelines, stipulating that dialogue topics were to be related to the EU agenda and agreed to by both parties; that participating organisations must be recognised or registered at national level and adheres to European values. Participating churches or associations are also encouraged to register with the European Transparency Register. The same year the Council adopted resolutions on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief in the EU external relations.

The implementation of Article 17 TFUE in the European Parliament (EP) is under the responsibility of its Vice-President, currently Antonio Tajani (B, Italy). During the current parliamentary term, Article 17 Dialogue sessions have focused on religious initiatives and fundamentalism (in March 2013), on how subsidies contribute to tackling radicalisation (November 2013), and on the role of women in countering radicalisation (April 2014).

The EP Subcommittee on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance, set up in 2014, aims at ensuring that the EU promotes and defends those freedoms in its external relations. It publishes yearly reports on the freedom of religion or belief all over the world, highlighting discrimination against religious minorities, among others against Jews, Christians and atheists.
**Religion in Europe**

**List of religious representative organisations**

- Holy See as Observer State of the Council of Europe
- Council of European Bishops’ Conferences
- Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- Churches’ Commission for migrants in Europe (CCME)
- Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See in the European Union
- Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
- The Church of England in the European Union
- The Salvation Army - International

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Religion in Europe
Pan-European NGOs

For further information visit the Transparency Register

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Religion in Europe
Religion in Numbers

Wikipedia - Religion in the European Union

Public Opinion (EC) – Personal religious background in Europe (pag.203) – 2010

Public Opinion (EC) – Discrimination based on religion and belief (pag.31) - 2015

Social acceptance and discriminations on the grounds of religion - 2015

Religious affiliation in UK

Belief "There is a God" per country based on Eurobarometer poll (2005)
Religion in Europe
Themes covered by European Sources Online

Religion
Burkini in France
ESO Information Guide: Vatican City
Islamic Veil

European Commission and religions
European Islamophobia Report 2015
Discrimination based on the grounds of religion
Islamophobia

Visit ESO for further information

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