



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

PROTECTION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP IN THE EU

General remarks

1. Broadening the scope of action: safety of places of worship **should not be reduced to terrorism** (instances of vandalism, violence, profanations, disruptions of assemblies, defacing, arson, harassment, acts of malevolence etc. are not related to terrorism but have to be prevented/countered).
2. Taking into account the **specificity of places of worship** compared to all other public places/buildings (extremely soft targets and uniquely vulnerable due to unrestricted, unguarded and free access). Element of welcome and openness are essential for these buildings to perform their role (i.e. need to balance security and welcome).
3. As in other contexts (e.g. non-discrimination) the **issue should not be framed in the “religious minorities” picture**, as it affects both majorities and minorities similarly.
4. Close link between the safety of places of worship and the full exercise of the **fundamental right to freedom of religion inside the EU** (i.e. protecting places of worship not just as a matter of security, but also of fundamental rights of every EU citizen and resident).
5. Church in the EU **does not want to develop a discourse of persecution** but intolerance and discrimination have to be countered.
6. Safety of places of worship is also **linked with proper maintenance/restoration** (i.e. badly preserved places of worship are easier targets/less easy to protect). Fiscal benefits for maintenance and restoration can be useful.

Good examples

1. **Specific funds for protection of places of worship**, like in the UK, with the Places of Worship Security Funding Scheme¹ providing financial support for physical protective security such as fencing, lighting, CCTV (for this fund the **requirement to prove a previous experience of hate crime incident directly affecting the place of worship was removed** in relation to the unpredictability of events).
2. In 2018-2019 the **Italian Bishops’ Conference** organised a cycle of **high-level conferences in cooperation with Carabinieri/law enforcement**, on the importance of fostering in all possible ways close collaboration between Churches/religious

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>.

communities and law enforcement². Title of the event: “Cultural goods and protection between present and future”, gathering **ecclesiastical, judiciary, ministerial, academic and operative actors**.

3. In 2014 in **Italy Guidelines**³ were adopted on the **protection of cultural ecclesiastical heritage** (joint document of the *Comando Carabinieri* for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the National Office of the Italian Bishops’ Conference).

Possible tools/solutions

1. Integration of the topic in all **Hate Crimes Action Plans/Roadmaps** etc. at the EU and national level.
2. Specific **EU and national calls for funding concerning places of worship** (i.e. not just inclusion in broader calls concerning public spaces). Need for **simplification of procedures to access** such funds and to **alert directly Churches and religious communities**.
3. Detailed, and precise **disaggregated statistics** at the EU, national and local level are essential to better address the phenomenon; affected **Churches and religious communities** can be excellent **sources of data**.
4. Multiplying this Commission **model of consultation** of Churches and religious communities **at the national and local level**. Appreciation and support to the implementation of the post-Notre Dame fire **3 May 2019 Paris Declaration**⁴.
5. Employing **financial resources** on **research** on security solutions (as mentioned in the relevant Communication) but also to **counter those who preach/practice hatred and violence** against Churches and religious communities.
6. **Training/security guidance of law enforcement to Churches, religious communities, worshippers** on preventing/responding/vigilance/reporting/security practices.
7. Improving **awareness of procedures to report hate crimes**.
8. Fostering **proactiveness on the side of Churches and religious communities** (if possible, appointing security teams or person responsible; risk assessments in relation to e.g. location, number of entry points, lighting; background checks of employees/volunteers).

² For further information cf. the link https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/MibacUnif/Comunicati/visualizza_asset.html_883432544.html.

³ For further information cf. the link https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/MibacUnif/Comunicati/visualizza_asset.html_1812939022.html.

⁴ For further information cf. the link <https://bit.ly/2OLSfgD>.

9. Promote the use of **inconspicuous/non-intrusive security solutions** (e.g. welcoming committees as a way to monitor suspicious behavior/persons; decorative elements to ensure perimeter security).
10. Facilitating **close collaboration with law enforcement** (availability of respective contact lists; exchanges of information on celebrations, religious events; networking with law enforcement; site assessments of vulnerability and effectiveness of measures taken).
11. **Education and dialogue** (including religious literacy, explaining to society the sacredness of places of worship and what they mean for believers).
12. Fostering exchanges of ideas/**mutual support between Churches and religious communities** (e.g. messages of solidarity in case of attacks).
13. Encourage **media to report and investigate cases thoroughly and without bias**.

Questions: which useful ideas emerged during the 7 October 2019 consultation session? Any element on which you would like Churches to comment? Will a Report be produced on the 7 October and 2 December 2019 sessions?

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