



# COMECE Annual Report — 2021

Special on  
the Conference  
on the Future  
of Europe



The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences  
of the European Union

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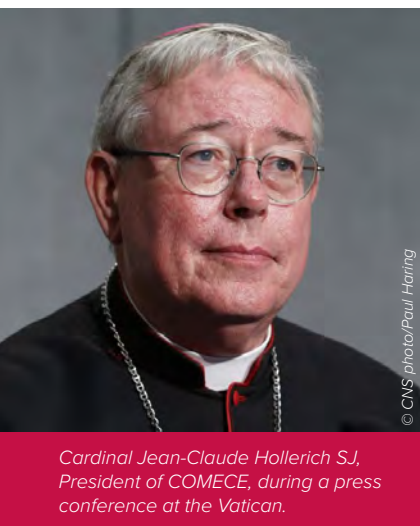
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# Foreword



Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J.,  
President of COMECE, during a press  
conference at the Vatican.

It was the evening of 27 March 2020 when, on the empty parvis of St Peter’s Basilica in Rome, Pope Francis celebrated the *Statio Orbis*, an extraordinary and historic moment of prayer at a time of pandemic.

To paraphrase the Holy Father, it was as if evening had fallen, as if thick darkness had thickened over our cities filled only with a deafening silence.

It was an evening longer than a year, a time of great uncertainty for everyone, of postponed plans, shattered dreams, broken lives, like that of H.E. Monsignor Aldo Giordano, Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, returned to the Father in December 2021 precisely because of COVID-19.

However long a night may be, there always comes morning, light, hope. 2021 was this, a year of hope.

It was the year the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 began. We appreciated the European Union’s coordinated actions with priority given to the most fragile, such as the elderly and the sick. Nonetheless, we also called several times to make vaccines accessible and free for all of Earth’s inhabitants – especially for the populations of the poorest countries where economic capacity is weak and health facilities are lacking.

2021 was a year of hope because the circumstances dictated by the pandemic had made very clear to everyone that it is necessary to work together in solidarity and brotherhood.

Quoting Pope Francis, “*we are all on the same boat*”, the right to life and health has no borders.

Vaccines have saved the lives of many people. We are grateful to the scientists who worked on them, but also to the doctors, the health workers, the volunteers who were there day and night to help, support and assist their brothers and sisters.

We cannot forget the workers who, despite the lockdowns, continued to work in factories, in the fields and streets, providing basic services and goods to all.

2021 was also a year of hope in the context of European institutions and the future of the European Union. Two years after its announcement, the Conference on the Future of Europe went through its most important phase, that of popular participation.



© Vatican Media

Pope Francis and Cardinal Hollerich during a private audience in June 2021.

The Catholic Church has supported and endorsed the Conference on the Future of Europe, seeing it as an extraordinary opportunity to shorten the distance between institutions and citizens and to reflect on the future of the Union.

In this context, COMECE dialogued with EU representatives, organised seminars, conferences and working groups, always leaving the initiative and the floor to young people, the real future of Europe. An example for all was the Catholic Youth Convention, which allowed hundreds of young Catholics from all over Europe to dialogue with the highest representatives of the EU. They proposed ideas, dreams and technical recommendations on the policies and competences of the EU that would make our Union more transparent, closer to local realities, at the service of people, families and communities, and more aware of its role in favour of peace, social justice, inclusion and sustainability.

We hope that the Conference on the Future of Europe will bear fruit worthy of its citizens' expectations.

We know that there will be new challenges, difficult moments. That is why it is important to continue cultivating hope, because this, as Pope Francis teaches us, *"is the most divine thing that can exist in the heart of mankind"*.

**Jean-Claude Card. Hollerich S.J.**  
President of COMECE  
Archbishop of Luxembourg

# The Conference on the Future of Europe

COMECE has accompanied the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) since it was announced at the end of 2019 and more closely since the inaugural conference plenary in June 2021.

Our Secretariat followed the official proceedings of the Conference, including three of the four citizens panels foreseen within the settings of the EU initiative, and monitored the multilingual digital platform, which collected citizens' ideas and registered events.

Between June and September 2021, COMECE organised a specific COMECE Youth Convention and a webinar on the role of the EU in the world. This webinar was held together with Justice and Peace Europe.

Both events were registered on the digital platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe and their results up-loaded on the same platform.

In December, COMECE and CEC held "Hope for Europe", a high-profile event on Churches' contribution to CoFoE. The event took place at the Chapel for Europe, in Brussels, and was the most visible contribution of COMECE to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The event involved EU Commissioner in charge of the Conference Dubravka Suica, the Slovenian State Secretary Gaspar Dovzan and MEPs Gozi and Scholz. The event also featured the active participation of young people who took part in the COMECE Youth Convention.

Further inputs were provided during the regular Article 17 TFEU consultations.



Colin Scicluna, Head of cabinet of the Vice President of the European Commission in charge of Democracy and Demography, discussing about the Conference of the Future of Europe in the context of the COMECE Autumn Assembly held on 27-28 October 2021.



Herman Van Rompuy, President emeritus of the European Council, discussing about the Conference on the Future of Europe in the context of the COMECE Autumn Assembly held on 27-28 October 2021.

*“The Conference on the Future of Europe is a sign of hope for Europe. And it is unique. No other international political body in the world has ever reached such a level of direct and qualitative citizen involvement.”*

*(Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ)*

### 8 April | COMECE-CEC letter to the CoFoE Executive Board

The Presidents of COMECE and CEC addressed a letter to the members of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe, highlighting the need to continuously strengthen our common European values *“in order to reaffirm commitment to the vision of the EU as a true community of values that contribute to a peaceful, prosperous, free, just, inclusive and sustainable Europe for all”*.

They also advocated for the integration of Churches in the Conference Plenary as distinct key stakeholders, in line with Article 17 TFEU.

### 7 May | COMECE-CEC statement on the Conference

COMECE and CEC welcomed the Conference as an initiative to involve all European citizens, civil society, as well as Churches and religious communities, in the discussion about what kind of European Union we want. *“A broad, open and inclusive discussion about the future of Europe – they stated - is a much needed first step to renew trust in and reinvigorate commitment to the European Union as a true community of values.”*



Screenshot of the COMECE Youth Convention on the Future of Europe held online on 3, 10 and 17 June 2021.



COMECE Adviser Stefan Lunte participating in the Article 17 Dialogue Seminar on CoFoE hosted by EP Vice-President Roberta Metsola on 16 November 2021.

**The Future is  
in your hands**

**Bringing the European  
project back to citizens**

 **European Economic  
and Social Committee**

 **Conference  
on the Future  
of Europe**

**#TheFutureIsYours**

<https://futureu.europa.eu/> 

Photo by Oliver Probst on Getty Images

### **3, 10, 17 June 2021 | Catholic Youth Convention**

Over 100 young Catholics from all EU Member States addressed today's most urgent issue in Europe, suggesting concrete policy proposals on Just social recovery, the Ecological and Digital transitions, and Democracy and European values.

### **27-28 October | COMECE Autumn Assembly**

Bishops engaged in a dialogue with EU representatives on the major challenges faced by EU citizens and institutions, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, during an exchange with Colin Scicluna – Head of cabinet of the Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Democracy and Demography – the Bishops had valuable insights on the functioning of the Conference and discussed its contents and possible outcomes.

### **16 November | EP Dialogue Seminar on CoFoE**

COMECE renewed the Catholic Church's support to the Conference on the Future of Europe, seen as an opportunity to vitalise the public debate on EU challenges and priorities.

### **7 December | "Our hope for Europe"**

COMECE, CEC and the Chapel for Europe held a hybrid dialogue event on the Conference on the Future of Europe. The meeting featured the participation of EU Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, as well as MEPs and representatives of governments of some EU Member States.

## 14 January 2022 | Article 17 High-level EC-Churches meeting

COMECE received updates on the Conference by EU Commissioner Šuica. On the same occasion, Cardinal Hollerich shared some of the COMECE positions on digitalization, democracy and values, climate policies, health policies, freedom of religion.

The President of COMECE stated: *“the Church would support concrete outcomes - as opposed to symbolic ones - and stands ready to further contribute in the contexts that will give continuity to the works of the Conference after its conclusion”*.



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Event 'Our hope for Europe', Chapel for Europe.

## 21-22 January 2022 | Churches participated at the Conference

Rev. Christian Krieger, President of CEC, participated, also on behalf of COMECE, in the Third Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe. He presented Churches' concerns on the future of Europe, as well as giving recommendations that highlighted the need to bring the EU closer to the European citizens by inventing new means of democratic debate.



© CEC

Mgr. Norvila, President of the COMECE EU External Affairs Commission, participating in the EC High-Level Dialogue Meeting on the Conference on the Future of Europe held online on 14 January 2022.



© CEC

CEC President Rev. Christian Krieger participates in the Third Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe also on behalf of COMECE. The meeting was held in Strasbourg on 21-22 January 2022.



*“Europe owes its existence and its identity to many influences, but we certainly cannot forget that one of the main influences, if not the main one, was Christianity itself”.*

*(Card. Pietro Parolin)*

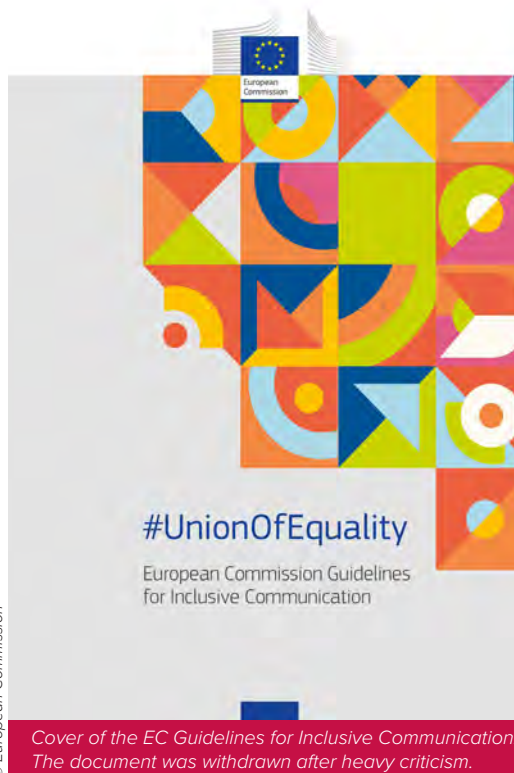
## DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHURCHES AND THE EU (ARTICLE 17 TFEU)

**A**rticle 17.3 TFEU provides that *“Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these Churches and organisations”.*

In this way, EU law provides the Catholic Church with a legal basis for dialogue with all EU institutions and bodies.

In 2021, COMECE consolidated its cooperation with European Parliament and European Commission Vice-Presidents in charge of Article 17 TFEU Dialogue. EC Vice-President Schinas was hosted as the keynote speaker at the COMECE 2021 Spring Assembly. A meeting with EC President von der Leyen was requested but declined.

In the context of the outcry caused by Commission internal guidelines on inclusive communication in November 2021 - which discouraged references to Christian feasts - COMECE was grateful to take part in an extraordinary high-level meeting with Vice-President Schinas, addressing concerns together with other religious denominations.



The European Commission also organised smaller-scale technical dialogue events to present and discuss concrete initiatives related to some of the most pressing issues on the EU agenda (e.g. integration and inclusion policies in May 2021, European Green Deal in June 2021).

The traditional ecumenical meetings with EU Council Presidencies were effectively continued during 2021, ensuring Churches' contribution to the relevant priorities.

Furthermore, transparency being one of the requirements of the Dialogue, COMECE supported and contributed to the reform process of the EU Transparency Register.

## Events

### Meeting with the Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council

On 12 May 2021, an ecumenical delegation of COMECE and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) met with Augusto Santo Silva, Portuguese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, to exchange on the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council.

The meeting was an occasion to exchange on the Conference on the Future of Europe. COMECE and CEC representatives expressed the hope that the Conference will involve all European citizens, civil society, as well as Churches and religious communities, and renew trust while reinvigorating commitment to the European Union as a true community of values.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ecumenical delegation highlighted the need to support the most vulnerable, implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and promote a fair and just recovery in a green and digital transition that leaves no one behind.

In their contribution, COMECE and CEC also shared their positions on the proposed EU Pact on migration and asylum, stressing that *“Europe has the responsibility to share peace and prosperity with its neighbours, and to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants by developing policies based on respect for human rights and the human dignity”*.

### Meeting with the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council

In the context of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council, on 5 November 2021, COMECE and CEC met with the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša.

The meeting took place in Ljubljana, where the delegation of EU Churches stressed the importance of pursuing a people-centred recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic while fostering Europe’s resilience in view of possible future crisis!

In their joint contribution, COMECE and CEC strongly advocated for global vaccine equity, emphasising the need for a socially just economic and sustainable recovery, as well as for promoting the voice of the youth.

The meeting was also an occasion to reaffirm EU Churches’ commitment to contribute to the Conference on the Future of Europe.



COMECE-CEC delegation meets with Augusto Santos Silva, Portuguese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, on 12 May 2021 in Lisbon. The delegation included COMECE and CEC Presidents, as well as Mgr. Nino Brás da Silva Martins, Portuguese Bishop Delegate.

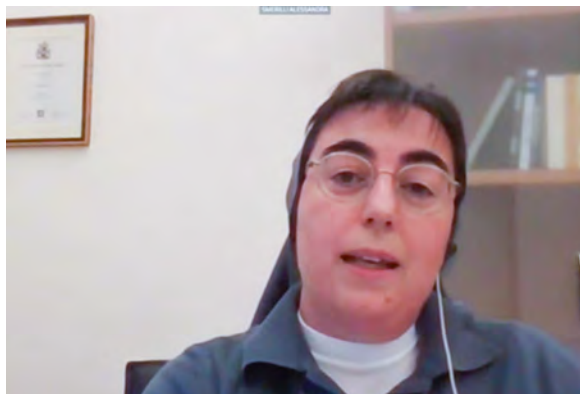
## Dialogue Seminar at the European Parliament on “EU Trade Policy – Which way forward?”

On 2 June 2021, COMECE participated in a dialogue seminar on EU trade policy hosted by European Parliament Vice-President Roberta Metsola. The meeting addressed the way forward for sustainable and responsible value chains in the global economy.

Invited by COMECE, Prof. Sr. Alessandra Smerilli F.M.A., Under-secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, called on the EU to pursue a relational strategic autonomy, open to multilateral partnerships centred on the human person and the care for Creation.

## Dialogue Seminar at the European Parliament on the Conference on the Future of Europe

On 16 November 2021, COMECE participated in an Article 17 TFEU dialogue meeting on the Conference on the Future of Europe. The event was hosted by Roberta Metsola, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, and featured the participation of EU Commissioners and MEPs, as well as representatives of Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations.



Screenshot of the EP online dialogue seminar on EU Trade Policy. The event featured the participation of Prof. Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., Under-Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

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COMECE restated the Catholic Church’s support to the Conference on the Future of Europe, seen as an opportunity to vitalise the public debate on EU challenges and priorities while exploring new ways to increase citizens’ participation in the EU policy-making process.

Disappointment about the absence of Church actors from the Assembly of the Conference on the Future of Europe was also expressed: *“leaving out the voice of Churches would impoverish the Conference”*.

## Ecumenical prayer for Christian Unity at the European Parliament

COMECE and CEC held an online ecumenical prayer for Christian Unity and for the future of Europe on 21 May 2021. The event also featured a special message from His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Under the theme *“Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit”*, the virtual prayer was hosted by MEP Patrizia Toia and was an occasion to pray and reflect on the European values of peace and justice, and the role of European Churches, especially amid the current COVID-19 pandemic.



Screenshot of the online Ecumenical Prayer for Christian Unity and for the Future of Europe, held on 21 May 2021. The event was organised by COMECE and CEC. It was hosted by the European Parliament.

© COMECE-CEC

EP Vice-President Roberta Metsola, responsible for the implementation of Article 17 TFEU, expressed appreciation for the role of the Churches in providing support to those communities that were severely affected by the pandemic. She also agreed on the importance of Churches' participation in the Conference on Future of Europe.

The prayer was led by H. Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ and Rev. Christian Krieger, Presidents of COMECE and CEC respectively. They highlighted the importance of unity in challenging times and prayed together to overcome divisions and foster reconciliation across Europe.

## **“Guidelines on Inclusive Communication”: Extraordinary meeting of the European Commission with religious leaders**

On 10 December 2021, COMECE participated in an extraordinary meeting organised by EC Vice-President Schinas with religious leaders. COMECE restated its position on the controversial Commission guidelines on inclusive communication and welcomed their withdrawal.

For COMECE, neutrality cannot mean relegating a certain religion to the private sphere. *“Christmas – was stated - is not only part of European religious traditions but also of European reality”.*

In this context, COMECE also stressed that respecting religious diversity and inclusiveness cannot lead to the paradoxical consequences of suppressing the religious element from public discourse or of causing the opposite effect of exclusion.

During the meeting, COMECE also raised questions on the internal scrutiny concerning the guidelines, underlining that they may have contributed to damaging the image of the Commission and of the European project.



© COMECE  
Screenshot of the participation of EC Vice-President Margaritis Schinas in the 2021 Spring COMECE Assembly held on 17-18 March 2021.



© Vlada RS  
Ecumenical delegation with Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša in Ljubljana on 5 November 2021. The delegation included COMECE and CEC Presidents, as well as Mgr. Franc Šuštar, Slovenian Bishop Delegate.

*“I dream of a Europe that is inclusive and generous. A welcoming and hospitable place in which charity, the highest Christian virtue, overcomes every form of indifference and selfishness”.*

*(Pope Francis)*

# MIGRATION & ASYLUM

**Despite the efforts under the Portuguese and Slovenian EU Presidencies, negotiations around the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed in September 2020 by the European Commission did not advance. In the meantime, the number of asylum seekers arriving in the EU increased by 28% compared with the previous year.**

COMECE expressed its concerns on the situation of irregular migrants and asylum seekers at the EU borders with Belarus, in particular in Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania, and urged the European Union and its Member States to protect the individual right to seek asylum and to set up legal and safe pathways for migrants.

COMECE reiterated this call especially in the context of the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, which provoked a new influx of asylum seekers.

Cardinal Hollerich also made an urgent appeal to relocate migrants that crossed the Mediterranean Sea and are already in the EU, welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating them.

The new EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, together with the 2021 appointment of a new EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, gave an impulse to the EU response against this crime. In this context, COMECE is actively promoting the adoption of EU preventive measures and advocating for victim-centred policies.



*Syrian refugees at the Eastern external borders of the European Union.*

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## The new proposed EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

A new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum was proposed by the European Commission in September 2020. Following a first statement released in December 2020, COMECE and its Christian Brussels-based published several detailed documents analysing some key aspects of the proposed Pact, stressing the centrality of the human person and his/her dignity at every stage of migratory experience.

Dissent among EU Member States continued in 2021, not only on the sensitive issue of refugee relocation, but also on the primary consideration of migration as the only solution for the population's decline in Europe. The proposed EU Pact was not adopted despite efforts by the Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies.

## Afghanistan and weaponization of migration

After the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021, the refugee crisis in Afghanistan was viewed with particular concern by the European Union, as many Afghans travelled via Turkey, wishing to take the so-called Balkan route to Western Europe.

While some EU Member States pledged to resettle Afghan refugees, the EU predominant approach was to assist neighbouring countries in hosting refugees. In a statement released in September 2021, the Presidents of COMECE and CEC urged the EU to show humanity and act with determination in addressing the human tragedy currently unfolding in the country.

A new source of concern was the so-called "weaponised" migration against Poland, Latvia and Lithuania by Belarus. The EU Council defined it "a state-sponsored organised smuggling of migrants by Belarus". The European Court of Human Rights asked Poland and Lithuania to provide humanitarian assistance for the migrants stuck at the border with Belarus. In addition, on October

2021 a letter was signed by 12 EU Member States with a very strong request to the EU for enhancing its external borders, including EU funding for border walls (which was rejected by the Home Affairs Commissioner). The COMECE President, H. Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, reacted to the letter calling for the respect of the right to asylum and the principle of *non-refoulement*, urging the EU and its Member States to act with generosity and solidarity towards those migrants in a vulnerable situation. A new COMECE statement expressed the need for practical solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers on the Polish-Belarusian border.

## Events

### 18-20 January

Webinar "Conversion in the asylum procedure, new developments and old challenges", with CCME, CEC and EEA.

### 17 February

Webinar "Human Dignity and Resilience: Migrants and Hosting Communities", with the EU office of the Community of Sant'Egidio.

### 22 October

Dialogue meeting with Kurdish Iraqi MPs delegation, facilitated by the EU office of the Community of Sant'Egidio.



Afghan man and his kids fleeing from Afghanistan.

© Amors Photos



Migrants and refugees on a flimsy boat risking their lives attempting to cross the Mediterranean sea and reach Europe.

## Contributions

### 4 May

Recommendations on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, by COMECE and other members of the Christian Group on Migration and Asylum.

### 22 June

Contribution to the European regional consultation on “*Intercultural Migration Ministry*”, at the request of the Holy See’s Migrants and Refugees Section.

### 2 September

COMECE-CEC joint statement urging the EU to protect vulnerable people in Afghanistan.

### 8 October

Statement by the COMECE President addressed to the EU and its Member States to set up legal and safe pathways for migrants.

### 11 November

COMECE President’s statement on the humanitarian situation of migrants and asylum seekers at the Polish-Belarusian border.

### 22 December

Cardinal Hollerich’s statement “*Appeal to the EU Member States authorities and to the Church in Europe: welcome and relocate refugees in concrete solidarity*”.

## Working Group Migration and Asylum

The Working Group is composed of experts on migratory and asylum policies delegated by the EU Episcopal Conferences.

Other Brussels-based Catholic organisations are also invited to take part and contribute to the meetings.

In 2021, the Working Group gathered twice (28 May, and 7 October) to discuss about the integration of migrants in hosting societies, the situation of Afghani asylum seekers and the EU response, the vulnerability of migrants at the EU-Belarus border and the state of play of the negotiations of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

**President:** Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto

**Secretary:** José Luis Bazán



Screenshot of the May 2021 meeting of the COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum.

*“[...] individuals have a responsibility to care for themselves and this translates into respect for the health of those around us. Health care is a moral obligation [...]”.*

*(Pope Francis)*

# ETHICS, RESEARCH & HEALTH

**The COMECE working fields of ethics, research and health were deeply influenced by the manifold developments of EU policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, whose effects challenged our societies.**

We witnessed fear and distrust, but also solidarity, and experienced a visible clash between public safety and individual rights and freedom.

While calling for solidarity, responsibility, and justice, in the context of this historical and dramatic situation, the Catholic Church urged the EU institutions to promote a sustained and social ethics discourse based on the principles of the EU founding fathers.

## **Digital Ethics**

With the aim of turning Europe into the global hub for trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI), in April 2021, the European Commission proposed a legal regulation package.

This initiative includes a legal framework for AI and a new Coordinated Plan with Member States that will guarantee the safety and fundamental rights of people and businesses while strengthening AI uptake, investment and innovation across the EU.

In its contribution, COMECE highlighted the importance of trust, stressing that the rules of the AI legal framework should be proportionate and flexible, setting the highest ethical standards and addressing the specific risks posed by AI systems.

In particular, according to COMECE, all remote biometric identification systems have to be considered of high risk and be subjected to strict requirements. Their live use in publicly accessible spaces for law enforcement has to be strictly regulated.

## **EU Health Policy during the COVID-19 pandemic**

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, COMECE reiterated its 2020 call for strengthening the cooperation between the EU and its Member



States to ensure affordability, sustainability and security of medical and pharmaceutical supply, while building a strategic resilience for a Europe of health.

In February 2021, together with Caritas Europa, COMECE urged the European Union to promote global public health as a public good, by carrying out a widescale global vaccination campaign that would benefit all, Europeans and the people living in poorer nations.

The global moral urgency highlighted by COMECE is to make vaccines available and affordable, therefore accessible for all.

In December 2021 COMECE and the Conferences of European Churches (CEC) published the joint appeal “Get vaccinated”, urging responsibility and care amid the ongoing pandemic, and encouraging vaccination alongside necessary sanitary measures.

## Financial Ethics

In November 2021, COMECE published the document “*Serving the common good in times of pandemic change*”, reflecting on macro and micro

level dilemmas, and suggesting the EU increase the contribution to international solidarity and fairer distribution of resources and risks across the globe in the field of finance.

The document was elaborated within the framework of the *ad-hoc* COMECE Working Group on Financial Ethics, chaired by Prof. Paul Dembinski, Director of the Geneva-based “*Observatoire de la Finance*”.

The reflection paper was reviewed by the COMECE Working Group on Ethics, together with external experts on financial ethics.



French EU Digital COVID Certificate with the QR code.

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COMECE appreciated the EU's coordinated actions with priority given to the most fragile, such as the elderly and the sick.

## Care for the elderly

COMECE contributed to a public consultation on the Green Book on Ageing proposed in January 2021 by the European Commission.

The content of its contribution reflected the call for intergenerational solidarity and care for the elderly, especially in times of demographic change, which was expressed by COMECE in 2020 through its reflection paper *“The Elderly and the Future of Europe”*.

COMECE underlined the necessity for improving participation in the labour market, especially for older workers, while also implementing systems of life-long learning, raising awareness of the issue of elderly abuse, and implementing a fair pension system.

In the context of longer life expectancy, COMECE has also stressed the importance of providing spiritual guidance to the elderly, as well as making the spiritual and cultural resources of elderly people more available to younger generations.

## Sexual and reproductive health rights

In June 2021, the European Parliament voted in favour of a resolution on the situation of sexual and reproductive health rights in the EU in the framework of women’s health (*Matić Report*).

As the Catholic Church considers human health *“an essential basis for a dignified life”*, COMECE welcomed *“the fundamental concern of the report to protect the health and rights of women”*.

However, COMECE also expressed objections to several descriptions and arguments made in the draft resolution.

In violation of the subsidiarity principle, the *Matić Report* disregarded the responsibility of the EU Member States to define their health policy and the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care.

*“This is also and especially true – COMECE stated – in highly sensitive areas such as the regulations adopted by the Member States on the conditions for abortion”*.

The EU Bishops also noted with regret that the draft resolution is characterised by a one-sided perspective throughout, particularly on the issue of abortion, which does not take full account of the life situations of the persons concerned and of their corresponding human rights.

In February 2021, the Presidency of COMECE addressed a letter to the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, underlying that neither the EU law nor the European Convention on Human Rights provides for a right to abortion. This matter is left up to the legal systems of each Member State.



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## Contributions

### 23 February

COMECE-Caritas Europa joint statement “*The European Union and the challenges of COVID-19 vaccines – EU’s core principles demand equity in vaccine access*”.

### 25 March

COMECE Presidency public letter to EP President Sassoli in the context of the “right to abortion”.

### 21 April

COMECE contribution to the EC public consultation on the Green Paper on Aging.

### 17 June

COMECE position paper on sexual and reproductive health rights of women (*Matic Report*).

### 16 November

Reflection paper “*A financial system serving the common good in times of systemic change*”.

### 14 December

COMECE-CEC joint appeal on COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

## Events

### 13 January

Webinar “*Ethics in the Covid-19 Pandemic*”.

### 1 March

COMECE-FAFCE Webinar on “*The Elderly and the Future of Europe*”.

### September

Exchange meeting together with Caritas Europa and the COVID-19 Task Force of the Vatican on intellectual property rights and patents of COVID-19 vaccines.

### September

Exchange meeting with external experts on financial ethics and the *ad-hoc* COMECE Working Group on financial ethics.

## Working Group on Ethics

The Working Group is composed of experts delegated by the EU Bishops’ Conferences. The moral theologian Prof. Antonio Autiero advises the group as a moderator.

The Assembly of the Working Group met twice (10 May, and 11 October) to discuss the EU vaccination certificate, the Conference on the Future of Europe, and the topic of conscientious objection.

In 2020 an *ad-hoc* COMECE Working Group on Financial Ethics was established. In 2021, this group, chaired by Prof. Paul Dembinski, elaborated the reflection paper “*A Financial system serving the common good in times of systemic change*”.

These settings allow the COMECE Working Group on Ethics to follow the relevant EU discussions and, with the advice of external experts, to prepare publications on current and future topics.

**President:** Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto

**Secretary:** Friederike Ladenburger



Screenshot of the online meeting of the COMECE Working Group on Ethics held on 18 May 2021.

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*“We need a new ecological approach that can transform our way of inhabiting the world, our lifestyles, our relationship with the Earth’s resources and, in general, our way of looking at humanity and of living life [...]”*

*(Pope Francis)*

# ECOLOGY & SUSTAINABILITY

**I**n the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences, COMECE, together with other Catholic actors working in the field of sustainability, reflected on how to maintain the momentum for a necessary transition towards an “integral ecology”.

This reflection was accompanied by practical recommendations provided to the EU political leaders taking part in the “COP-26” on climate change (UK, October-November 2021) and to those who will participate in the repeatedly postponed COP-15 on biodiversity (China, April-May 2022).

COMECE closely followed the policy strands of the European Green Deal developed by the European Commission, for example on food (farm-to-fork policy), biodiversity and soil protection.

Moreover, a significant part of the 2021 COMECE activities in this field was devoted to initiatives taken in the framework of the European Laudato Si’ Alliance (ELSiA), of which COMECE is a founding member.



Group photo of the participants of the Eco-Spirituality Workshop held at the Community of Taizé, France.

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Laudato Si’ advocates an integral approach and cooperation: in this sense, contributions were made to the Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA), to events of the Laudato Si’ Research Institute and to the Ecology Working Group of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission.

## **Sustainability, it is all about conversion**

The loss of biodiversity makes it very clear how complex ecological issues are. According to recent statistics, for example, the insect population in Europe has decreased by almost 70% in the past 25 years. This loss is due to intensive human intervention in nature, including industrial agriculture, and to climate change and its consequences, such as rising temperatures, drought, flooding.

In the attempt of making agricultural activities more sustainable, COMECE reiterated the need to promote “farm-to-fork” policies, which are not exclusively oriented towards production but consider the entire food chain, from the producer of the basic products to the consumer. In this sense, COMECE provided recommendations to the EU through contributions and consultations, such as the documents released in the context of COP-26/COP-15.

Another essential point is the consistency of Church positions in ecology and sustainability. An increasing part of the work of COMECE in 2021 was devoted to intensify and improve coordination and consultation among Brussels-based Church organisations working on this field and the Holy See.

Today is evident that “ecological transition” and “lifestyle change” cannot be achieved only by technical measures. They require a conversion, an “ecological spirituality”, which is increasingly gaining importance. The question is: how this could be implemented in the dialogue with politicians and European administration?

## ELSIA

The European Laudato Si’ Alliance (ELSIA) is a network of Catholic organisations committed to bringing the prophetic message of the Laudato Si’ Encyclical to life, tackling simultaneously the ecological and social crisis that we face in our times. The alliance started to work in 2020 and after the pilot year, members committed to further strengthening their collaboration starting with a 3-year initiative titled: “*ELSIA 2021-23: a partnership for the Promotion of Integral Ecology in Europe*”. Key areas of work and achievement in 2021 include:

- **continue to develop and strengthen ELSIA;**
- **ecological advocacy;**
- **ecological best practices;**
- **ecological spirituality.**

Member organisations have committed to walking together on this path of ecological conversion, embracing the implementation of the seven goals of Laudato Si’ and with renewed commitment to one another as brothers and sisters as inspired by the encyclical Fratelli Tutti.

ELSIA is also committed to be of service to and collaborate with all Catholic organisations, Church actors and ecclesial network alliances and identify together key areas for collaboration.

**Coordinator:** Cinzia Verzeletti



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Official Logo of the European Laudato Si’ Alliance.

### LAUDATO SI' REFLECTION DAY

TRANSCENDENT GOALS: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CHURCH AND FROM THE EU



SKETCHNOTES/ZAMPINI LANG

© ELSIA

Sketchnotes by Zsofi Lang on the 4th session of the 2021 European Laudato Si’ Reflection Day.

## Contributions

### 6 April

Contribution to the Consultation of the European Commission on the protection of biodiversity.

### 7 May

Contribution to the EC consultation on Education for environmental sustainability.

### 24 September

Statement of the partners of ELSiA on COP-26 and COP-15. The document was sent to the Presidents of EC, EP, Council and to the Slovenian Presidency.

### 17 December

Statement «COMECE welcomes the CAP reform and encourages the EU to make it part of a broader ecological transition».

## Events

### 26 April

Internal capacity building webinar “*The wailing of God’s creatures – Catholic social teaching, human activity and the collapse of biological diversity*”. The event was co-organised together with CAFOD, CIDSE, GCCM and LSRI.

### 27 May

4th European Laudato Si’ Reflection Day. The event was co-organised by the member organisations of ELSiA.

### 29 June

Webinar on the EU «LIFE» Program. The event was co-organised with by the member organisations of ELSiA.

### 12-14 November

Eco-Spirituality Workshop in Taizé, France. The event was co-organised by the Community of Taizé and ELSiA.



© Photo: rafapress/Shutterstock

COP-26 UN Climate Change Conference, held in Glasgow in October-November 2021.

*“To deny fundamental rights  
is to deny human dignity”*

*(Pope Francis)*

# LEGAL AFFAIRS & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

**In 2021 COMECE continued to address the Legal Affairs & Fundamental Rights dossier through the lenses of freedom of religion and the impact of EU initiatives on the daily activities of the Catholic Church. Actions in this sense were taken in areas ranging from data protection to the safety of places of worship, to hate speech/hate crimes legislation.**

COMECE also addressed non-discrimination policies, taking a strong position on the divisive Commission guidelines on inclusive communication, as well as reflecting on the wearing of religious symbols at the workplace.

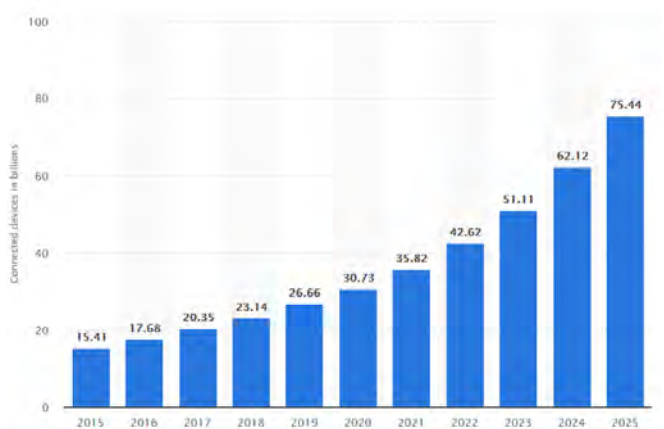
A strong stance was also taken on child protection, stressing aspects like the crucial role of transparency, victim-centric and trauma-informed perspectives, and protecting children as a public health issue.

## Protection of personal data

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a permanent priority of the Catholic Church in Europe. Detailed work was carried out on the revision of the COMECE internal guidance for the EU Bishops' Conferences, to be finalised in 2022.

On 29 April 2021, the 3rd edition of the Church data protection expert meeting had two main focuses: a fruitful dialogue with the European Data Protection Board, devoted to data processing on the basis of 'legitimate interest', and a reflection on the interaction between the GDPR and Canon law. The impact of EU law on the preservation of Church archives was the main feature of a further informal meeting held in June.

With the support of the experts from EU Bishops' Conferences, COMECE also started collecting pending cases concerning data protection and the Church. In the Member States the relevant note will be regularly updated.



© Statista 2019

*By 2025, an estimated 75 billion devices will have an Internet connection (compared to 25 billion in 2019). This growth illustrated in the graph below will lead to more and more connected personal data.*

## Protection of places of worship in the EU

Following up on the intense work dedicated in 2020 to the protection of places of worship, COMECE contributed to the drafting of a new EU quick guide to help ensure their safety. The contribution stressed the relevance of the link between the security of places of worship and the exercise of freedom of religion, over their mere symbolic value.

Contacts and cooperation with both the EU institutions (e.g. Operators' Forum for the protection of public spaces) and the EU-funded 'Prosperes Consortium' were regular and effective, with a long-term commitment to this dossier, including in the context of new EU funding opportunities.

## Hate speech and hate crimes

In the context of a general rise of hate speech and hate crimes in Europe, COMECE condemned this grave phenomenon, reiterating the Church's proactive support to tackling it with effective policies.

The European Commission announced its intention to include this item among those crimes on which the EU can propose legislation; however, COMECE suggested the Member States level as the most appropriate.

In a contribution to an EU public consultation, COMECE supported approaches that strongly safeguard freedom of expression and freedom of religion, while protecting each person regardless of belonging to religious minorities or majorities.

## Contributions

### 22 January

Statement of the COMECE President on the erosion of freedom of religion in EU Member States.

### 5 February

Comments to the "EU Draft quick guide to improve the security of places of worship".

### 14 April

Contribution to the EC consultation on "Child sexual abuse online - detection, removal and reporting".

### 19 April

Contribution to the European Commission consultation on "Hate speech & hate crime – inclusion on list of EU crimes".

### 29 April

Feedback on the European Commission Digital Services Act package (Fundamental Rights).



The church of Notre Dame in Nice after the 2020 terrorist attack.



The intensification of digital communication has led to an increase of hate speech online in 2020.



#### 4 June

Contribution to the European Commission consultation survey on the draft “*Transparency Register Guidelines for Applicants and Registrants*”.

#### 30 November

Statement of the COMECE President on the European Commission guidelines on inclusive language.

#### 13 December

Contribution to the European Commission meeting with stakeholders on recognition of parenthood.

### Events

#### 29 April

3rd annual meeting of Data Protection Experts of EU Bishops’ Conferences.

#### 23 June

Informal expert meeting on ecclesial archives and the GDPR.

### Legal Affairs Commission

The COMECE Legal Affairs Commission gathers legal experts mandated by the EU Bishops’ Conferences. In 2021 this Commission met twice (25 February, and 17 September) to exchange on topics such as data protection (GDPR, as well as the Data Governance Act), the reform of the EU Transparency Register, jurisprudence on ritual slaughter of animals and religious symbols at work, anti-money laundering legislation.

**President:** Mgr. Theodorus C.M. Hoogenboom

**Secretary:** Alessandro Calcagno



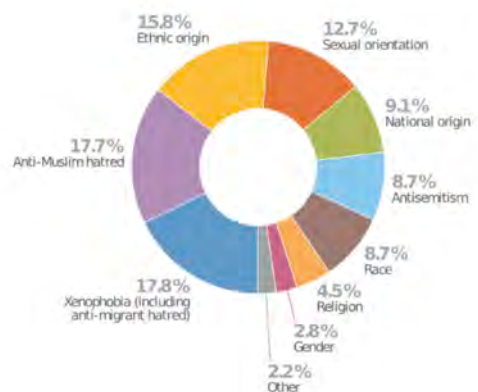
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Screenshot of the meeting of the COMECE Legal Affairs Commission on 17 September 2021.



© Twitter Helena Dalli

EU Commissioner Helena Dalli, with the guidelines that have lead to controversy.



© Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe

Types of hate content removed from platforms that have signed the EU Code of Conduct by January 2018.

*“A different approach to poverty is required. This is a challenge that governments and world institutions need to take up with a farsighted social model capable of countering the new forms of poverty that are now sweeping the world and will decisively affect coming decades.”*

*(Pope Francis)*

# SOCIAL & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on families, workers and society as a whole. In this context, the European Commission has put forward an action plan to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, ensuring that no one is left behind while recovering.

One of its key-targets is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million people. On top of dedicated funding under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), this objective is supported by social initiatives adopted by the Commission in 2021, such as:

- the 2030 Disability Rights Strategy and Binding Pay Transparency Measures (March);
- the Child Guarantee and the Platform on Combating Homelessness (June);
- and a proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work and the Social Economy Action Plan (December).

One year after the COVID-19 hit the EU, the COMECE Social Affairs Commission analysed some of the EU achievements towards social, ecological and contributive justice, and actively called on the EU institutions, EU leaders and all people of goodwill to listen to the ‘cry of the poor’ in the context of the pandemic and beyond.

## Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic: Helping people in Poverty

One year after the 2020 EU recovery package and following COMECE’s first reaction in April 2020, the Social Affairs Commission published a statement analysing some of the EU achievements towards social, ecological and contributive justice, making proposals for more solidarity in the recovery process, including on tackling poverty.

In 2019, around 91 million people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU - according to the European Commission. The COVID-19 crisis



*Mgr. Antoine Hèrouard while chairing the 15-16 November 2021 meeting of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission.*

© COMECE

has worsened the lives of many people. Therefore, during the European Social Summit in Porto on 7-8 May 2021, EU leaders approved the three targets proposed in the EC Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, including to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty by at least 15 million persons by 2030.

In this context, COMECE published a statement, prepared by its Social Affairs Commission, reflecting on the social implications of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable people, mentioning key EU initiatives to support them, and highlighting the positive role of the Catholic Church during the pandemic and beyond. The publication was presented during an event on the occasion of the Fifth World Day of the Poor, initiated by Pope Francis.

## Fair work and working conditions

The COVID-19 pandemic reflected the failures of an economic model that does not recognise the value of care workers, does not sufficiently integrate vulnerable people into the labour market, and does not systematically ensure decent working conditions for platform workers.

Moreover, the pandemic and its consequences on working women made it even more urgent to address the issue of pay gap between men and women, estimated at around 14% in the EU.

Through several 2021 initiatives, the EU aims to tackle these issues by binding measures on pay transparency, improving working conditions in the platform economy and the 2030 Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Chaired by Mgr. Antoine Hérouard, the COMECE Social Affairs Commission held several roundtables during its Spring and Autumn Assemblies, bringing together experts delegated by the Bishops' Conferences with EU officials and key stakeholders. They discussed ways to enhance workers' dignity, applied to the current EU legislative framework. They also raised attention on the necessity to move from a profit-driven model of growth toward a model that cares for people and the common good.

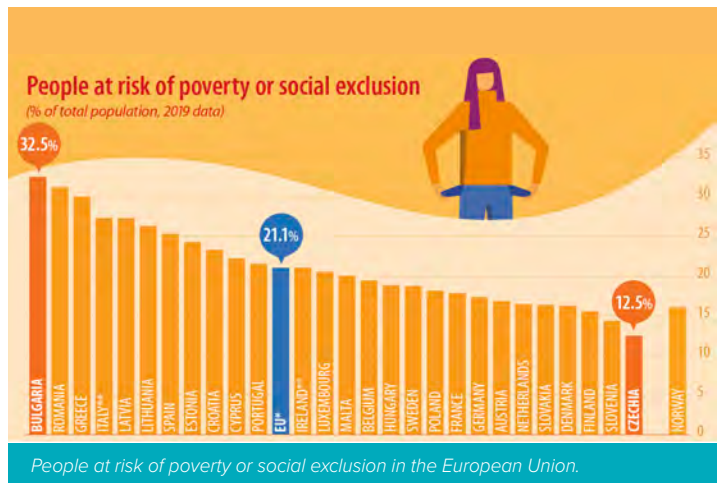
## Distributive justice

Digitalisation is profoundly changing the business landscape, a phenomenon reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. While some Multinational Companies (MNCs) have benefited from the crisis, States have contracted public debts to support the recovery and invest in public services. The corporate tax legislation of the last century has been based on the principle of physical presence.

However, digitalisation and a lack of harmonisation between EU taxation systems encourage aggressive tax avoidance by MNCs.



Riders of home delivery food at work in Milan.



At a global level, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was charged to reform corporate tax rules in light of the new challenges of the digital economy. In parallel, in its 2021 work programme, the European Commission announced a legislative proposal on a digital levy as part of the EU's resources.

Together with Church delegates from the Bishops' Conferences, social partners and high-level politicians from the EU, the COMECE Social Affairs Commission organised a roundtable dedicated to promoting a fair corporate tax system and stopping the "race to the bottom", while expressing the risks of a unilateral digital levy in the EU.

The proposal on a digital levy was permanently removed from the EU agenda, while the International OECD agreement was integrated as part of the new resources package (dec. 2021).

In another roundtable, the Social Affairs Commission further explored ways to promote distributive justice, discussing the minimum wage or the (universal) basic income from a Church perspective.

## European Sunday Alliance

The pandemic accelerated digitalisation, in some cases intensifying work and extending working hours. Moreover, it profoundly touches the Sunday protection as a common day of rest in the EU.

During the pandemic, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament presented its legislative report on the "right to disconnect".

As founding member of the European Sunday Alliance - a broad network of more than 100 national Sunday alliances, trade unions, employers' organisations, civil society organisations, Churches and religious communities - COMECE co-organised the webinar *"The right to disconnect and the need for a European weekly common day of rest"*.

Held in June 2021, the event raised awareness of the value of synchronised free time for our European societies. Among others, the webinar featured the participation of MEP Alex Agius Saliba (S&D, Malta), Rapporteur of the Parliament's resolution, and Mr Max Uebe, whose unit at the European Commission has been tasked to prepare the legislative proposal.

In addition, on 3rd March 2021, following up on a video campaign, the Alliance released a statement on the European Day for a work-free Sunday. The Alliance also contributed to a consultation of the Commission on a new Strategic Framework for Health and Safety at Work.



© ESA

Logos of the member organisations of the European Sunday Alliance.

## Contributions

### 3 March

The European Sunday Alliance releases a statement on the Annual European Day for a Work-Free Sunday, promoting synchronised free time in the EU.

### 13 April

*“One year after: What place for social, ecological and contributive justice in the EU recovery package?”*, reaction of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission to the EU recovery package.

### 14 October

Statement of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission *“Listen to the cry of the Poor in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery”*.

### 16 November

Reflection paper on financial ethics: *“Serving the common good in times of systemic change”*.

## Events

### 25-26 May

Spring 2021 Social Affairs Commission

### 1 June

Webinar *“The right to disconnect and the need for a European weekly common day of rest”*, held by the European Sunday Alliance.

### 30 October

Crakow Conference: participation of COMECE Social Affairs Commission President Mgr. Hérouard on the topic of *“Integral ecological justice in the context of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”*.

### 15 November

COMECE webinar *“Listen to the Cry of the Poor in the context of COVID-19 and its recovery”*.

## Social Affairs Commission

The Commission monitors EU social and economic policies and prepares statements, contributions and organises activities related to this field.

Under the chairmanship of Mgr. Antoine Hérouard (France), the Commission met on three occasions (in May and November) to exchange, among the others, on the following topics: enhancing the fight against poverty, improving working conditions of Platform workers, taxing digital businesses and multinational companies, social taxonomy, the EU recovery package, basic income, and gender pay gap.

**President:** Mgr. Antoine Hérouard

**Secretary:** Alix de Wasseige



Screenshot of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission held on 25-26 May 2021.

© COMECE

*“We think of the firm conviction of the founders of the European Union, who envisioned a future based on the capacity to work together in bridging divisions and in fostering peace and fellowship between all the peoples [...]”*

*(Pope Francis)*

# EU EXTERNAL ACTION

**T**hroughout 2021, COMECE has continued to closely accompany the preparations for the **European Union-African Union Summit in dialogue with Church and civil society actors from Africa.**

We have also contributed to discussions around a new partnership with the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood and promoted a mandatory EU due diligence legislation holding businesses liable for human rights violations and environmental harm throughout their supply chains.

Together with Bishops from the United States of America, COMECE also elaborated proposals for a renewed transatlantic partnership and contributed to reflections on the future direction of the European security and defence policy.

COMECE | The Catholic Church in the EU  
@ComeceEu

As @vonderleyen, @eucopresident and @POTUS are meeting today for the EU-US Summit, the Catholic Church encourages them to renew the transatlantic partnership for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

Read joint @ComeceEu-@USCCB statement:  
[bit.ly/3q6R4L7](https://bit.ly/3q6R4L7)

A COMECE Tweet launching the statement “Shared Responsibility for the Whole Human Family” elaborated together with the US Bishops’ Conference.

© COMECE

## Making the Mediterranean a place of peaceful encounters

Being confronted with manifold security, socio-economic, human rights and ecological challenges, the Mediterranean region needs to become a place of peaceful encounters of persons of different cultures and religions.

In the context of the pertinent EU consultation on the future cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood, COMECE offered policy recommendations for a people-centred and fair partnership with this region.

During a meeting with Mr. Olivér Várhelyi, EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, a COMECE delegation led by its President H.Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, and H.E. Mgr. Youssef Soueif, Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli (Lebanon), welcomed the efforts of the European Union to promote stability, peace and prosperity in the Southern Neighbourhood. On that occasion, COMECE also called for *“EU policy responses rooted in the Union’s fundamental values and fully respectful of the human dignity and rights of every person, including migrants and refugees”*.

The delegation also highlighted the active engagement in humanitarian efforts by local Churches in Lebanon and other countries of the Southern Neighbourhood, expressing readiness to partner with the EU on addressing the needs of the people, especially in the fields of healthcare and education.

## Towards a renewed transatlantic partnership

Ahead of the June 2021 EU-US Summit gathering political leaders from both sides of the Atlantic, H. Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ and H.E. Mgr. José Horacio Gómez, Presidents of COMECE and USCCB respectively, issued a joint statement calling for a renewal of the transatlantic ties rooted in shared values of freedom, democracy, rule of law, justice, and respect for human life.

The Bishops reminded political leaders that most of the countries were still far away from the prospect of a post-pandemic world, and encouraged them to accelerate their efforts in the global vaccine roll-out to ensure an equitable access to vaccines for all, especially the most poor and vulnerable.

Entitled *“Shared Responsibility for the Whole Human Family”* and inspired by Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter *“Fratelli tutti”*, the joint declaration exhorted *“the EU and the US to be beacons of trust across the global community and engines for a reinvigoration of multilateral cooperation”*.

The COMECE and USCCB Presidents also urged the EU and the US to redefine common priorities serving *“a people-centred and just recovery from the pandemic and its consequences, intensifying common efforts for a more peaceful world, and strengthening the commitment to a better care for our common home”*.



Tanzanian women washing clothes on the shore of Lake Tanganyika.

## For a people-centred and fair EU-Africa partnership

In the run-up to the 6th EU-AU Summit (February 2022), COMECE intensified dialogue efforts with partners in Africa and Europe to promote the vision of a people-centred and fair partnership.

Together with faith-based actors and policy-makers, a webinar was organised on the role of local communities in enhancing food and nutrition security in the future EU-Africa partnership.

Moreover, to mark the thematic year of the African Union dedicated to “Arts, Culture and Heritage”, COMECE held a dialogue meeting with the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and representatives of the EU and its Member States, to discuss the importance of religious and cultural heritage for fostering people-to-people contacts between the two continents.

In cooperation with Don Bosco International and Misioneros Salesianos, COMECE also raised awareness on the human rights challenges faced by minors serving their sentences in prisons in some African countries.

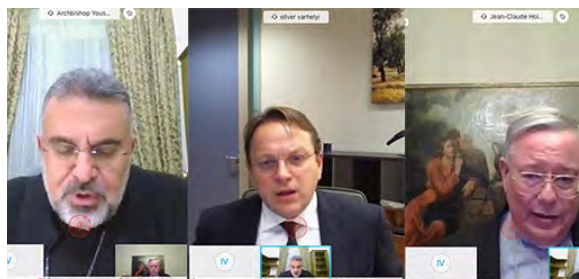
## List of contributions

### 18 January

*“Making the Mediterranean again a place of peaceful encounters”*, a contribution of COMECE in view of the renewal of EU’s partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood.

### 10 February

*“Contribution to the EU public consultation on Sustainable Corporate Governance”*, jointly elaborated by COMECE, CIDSE, Pax Christi International and Justice and Peace Europe.



Screenshot of the online meeting between EU Commissioner Várhelyi, COMECE President Card. Hollerich and Mgr. Soueif on the future Southern Partnership. The meeting was held on 18 January 2021.

© COMECE



Mgr. Norvila and Lt. Gen. Giovanni Manione (Deputy Director of the EU Military Staff) on the occasion of the meeting of the COMECE Commission on EU External Relations held in Brussels on 13 October 2021.

© COMECE



## 8 June

“*Shared Responsibility for the Whole Human Family*”, a joint declaration towards a renewed transatlantic partnership.

## 2 September

“*CEC–COMECE joint statement on Afghanistan: Call for prayer, solidarity and urgent action to protect the vulnerable*”.

## Events

### 15 March

COMECE and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) co-organised a webinar on the “*Religious and political implications of Pope Francis’ historic journey to Iraq*”.

### 23 November

“*Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security in the EU-Africa partnership*”, an online discussion on the role of local actors in enhancing food and nutrition security co-organised with GIZ and faith-based partners.

### 1 December

“*Returning (to) cultural heritage*”, a webinar on the role of cultural and religious heritage in the future EU-Africa partnership.

## Commission on EU External Relations

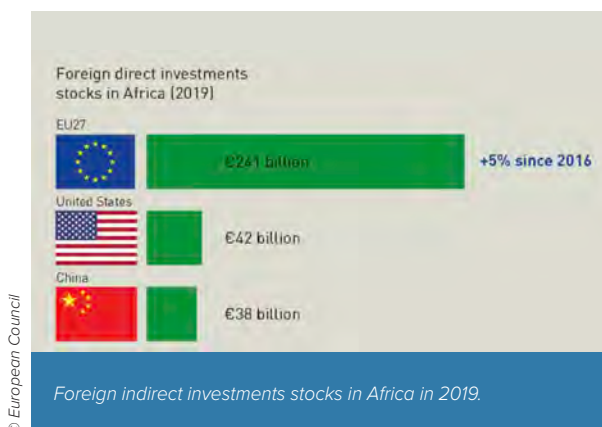
Under the chairmanship of H.E. Mgr. Rimantas Norvila (Lithuania), the COMECE Commission on EU External Relations gathered on 26 April and 13 October to discuss with EU and Church representatives the role of the European Union in addressing the current challenges in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood.

The Commission members highlighted the essential role of the EU in promoting lasting peace and sustainable human development in its neighbourhood. They also encouraged the EU to seek creative ways of engagement with Churches and religious actors on the ground in areas such as conflict prevention, reconciliation, education, healthcare, and basic social services.

The Commission monitors and prepares statements, contributions and other activities to the EU-policy and public debate on areas of EU’s External Action, such as Security & Defence, Sustainable Development, Neighborhood, Human Rights and Trade.

**President:** Mgr. Rimantas Norvila

**Secretary:** Marek Mišák



*“To educate is always an act of hope,  
one that calls for cooperation in turning  
a barren and paralyzing indifference  
into another way of thinking  
that recognizes our interdependence”.*

*(Pope Francis)*

# EDUCATION & CULTURE

**C**OMECE strived to address issues related to these policy fields in close dialogue with the EU institutions, while bridging with the EU Bishops’ Conferences and Brussels-based faith organisations.

The focus was set on a reflection on the European Education Area, in particular on Vocational Education and Training for the integral development of the person, as well as on education for environmental sustainability.

In the cultural domain, COMECE activities highlighted the importance of Christian and religious cultural heritage in the context of EU policies and in partnerships with non-EU countries.

Through events, consultations and the dedicated COMECE Working Group, EU Bishops strived to foster a culture of dialogue, as promoted by Pope Francis, advocating for an integral vision of the learner in all educational forms and processes, and for renewed impetus for culture in its spiritual and ecological dimensions.



Poster of the COMECE-DBI webinar “VET for integral and inclusive education in Europe” held on 3 June 2021.

© COMECE-DBI

## An integral vision of Education: Vocational Education and Training

In the context of the European Education Area, a major focus was set by the EU on the sector of Vocational Education and Training (VET). Through its policies, the European Union highlighted the importance of VET formation for learners and workers, pointing out the necessity of new resources for developing those new competencies and skills needed in the green and digital transitions.

Together with Don Bosco International, in June 2021 we organised the webinar “*VET for integral and inclusive education in Europe – Educating and Upskilling the Next Generation of the EU and beyond*”, raising awareness of the precious contribution that VET can offer for a more inclusive and integral Education in the EU.

This event was an opportunity to exchange with EU policymakers from the Commission, the Council and the Parliament, as well as with VET practitioners, reflecting on the contribution of this education form to social integration, integral development of learners, and the fight against marginalisation and unemployment.

## Culture and sustainability New European Bauhaus

The importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the ecological challenge was addressed by the EC initiative New European Bauhaus, which con-

tinued its course in 2021 with the implementation of the design and delivery phases.

In April 2021, COMECE organised the webinar “*Spirituality, Sustainability and Style*”, together with the Pontifical Council for Culture, to address the theological, cultural and technical dimensions of the New European Bauhaus.

The event brought together architects, urbanists, historians, theologians and policymakers from Europe and beyond. The report underlines the need for community participation in the co-creation of spaces and to rethink the spiritual and social use of churches and other religious buildings in the context of the Commission’s initiative.

The report was submitted to the platform of the *New European Bauhaus*, presenting both the contents of the discussion and the valuable contribution that the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* can offer to this EU initiative.

## Cultural heritage in EU external relations

Religious and cultural heritage is one of the most valuable drivers of social cohesion, intercultural encounter, as well as human and economic development. With its cross-cutting characteristics, it immensely contributes to several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, supporting peace, sustainability, quality education and well-being.



Screenshot taken during the event “*Returning (to) cultural heritage*” on EU-Africa partnership held on 1 December 2021.

© COMECE



Signing ceremony of a 4-year collaboration agreement between COMECE and the Universitat Abat Oliba CEU.

© COMECE

The African Union (AU) valorised cultural heritage through its 2021 thematic year *“Art, Culture and Heritage: Levers for building the Africa we want”*. In light of the February 2022 EU-African Union summit and in order to promote an authentic “culture of dialogue”, as highlighted in Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, COMECE organised the webinar *“Returning (to) cultural heritage: Discussing the role of cultural and religious heritage in the EU-AU partnership”*.

This event was an occasion to reflect jointly with policymakers, Church representatives from the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and practitioners from Europe and Africa on the social role of cultural and religious heritage.

## Contributions

### 7 July

Contribution to the EU Consultation on *“Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability”*.

### 10 May

Contribution to the EU Consultation on Education for environmental sustainability.

### 24 August

COMECE contributed to the design phase of the New European Bauhaus initiative with the final report of the webinar *“Spirituality, Sustainability and Style”*.

### 29 September

Contribution to the EU Consultation on the European Education Area initiative “Pathways to School Success”.

## Events

### 3 June

*“VET for integral and inclusive education in Europe – Educating and Upskilling the Next Generation of the EU and beyond”*, jointly organised with Don Bosco International.

### 15 April

*“Spirituality, Sustainability and Style - A joint webinar event and dialogue session of the Pontifical Council for Culture and COMECE on the New European Bauhaus initiative”*, organised together with Pontifical Council for Culture.

### 1 July

Online signing ceremony of a 4-year collaboration agreement with Universitat Abat Oliba CEU to gather synergies with the academia in the context of our mission of dialogue with the EU.

### 1 December

*“Returning (to) cultural heritage - Discussing the role of cultural and religious heritage in the EU-AU partnership”*.

## Working Group on Education and Culture

The Working Group was established in December 2020 and is composed of the experts delegated by the EU Bishops’ Conferences. In 2021, the Working Group met twice (22 March, and 22 November) to exchange on the contribution of the Catholic Church to the six dimensions of the European Education Area and on the EU cultural programme *Creative Europe*, as well as ways to enhance the synergy of EU Episcopates on religious education and culture heritage.

**President:** Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto

**Secretary:** Emilio Dogliani



Photo taken during the COMECE Working Group on Culture and Education on 22 November 2021.

© COMECE

*“Freedom of conscience and religious freedom – which is not limited to freedom of worship alone but allows all to live in accordance with their religious convictions – are inseparably linked to human dignity.”*

*(Pope Francis)*

# INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**T**he situation of religious freedom is generally deteriorating worldwide. The EU and international actors have had a limited impact in reversing this trend.

Under the 2021 ACN International Religious Freedom Report, 67% of the world’s population live in countries that exhibit grave violations of religious freedom.

State attacks on religious freedom come primarily from the authorities of countries with totalitarian regimes, Islamist governments, or those promoting ethnic and religious supremacy.

A rise of transnational Islamist networks present in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian Ocean coastal countries, and South-East Asia aim to establish a “transcontinental caliphate”, worsening the already precarious conditions suffered by some religious communities, including Christians.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought further restrictions to religious freedom public expression. The European Parliament and the EEAS have addressed violations in several countries and regions in the world. On some occasions, they have also commended the efforts by local authorities to protect religious freedom.



People flee insecurity and violence in Cabo Delgado, a northern province in Mozambique, in December 2021.

The EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief finished its mandate on October 2019. Nearly two years after, the European Commission appointed Christos Stylianides as the new Special Envoy. Following his subsequent resignation a few months later, the post remains vacant.

In a letter addressed to EC President Ursula von der Leyen, COMECE President Cardinal Hollerich recalled the need of strengthening this EU mechanism, supporting it “with reasonable and adequate human and financial resources that enable the EU Special Envoy to carry on his high responsibility, with a more ambitious and defined mandate and capacity”.

COMECE has denounced some new trends undermining religious freedom, in particular ideological versions of human rights, and the negative impact on vulnerable religious communities caused by certain restrictive anti-COVID-19 measures.

## Events

### 4 February

The President of COMECE took part in the webinar “*International Day of Human Fraternity*” organised by the EPP Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue Unit on the occasion of the International Human Fraternity Day.

### 30 June

COMECE-ACN webinar entitled “*Targeting vulnerable religious communities through sexual violence and exploitation of women*”, with the contribution, among others, of Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights.

### 16 September

Stakeholders’ meeting on religious freedom advocacy in Brussels.

### 2 October

COMECE-ACN meeting with card. Joseph Coutts, Metropolitan Archbishop Emeritus of Karachi (Pakistan), and representatives of religious organisations promoting freedom of religion around the world.

### 10 November

Dialogue meeting with former EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Jan Figel.



Pope Francis arrives in Erbil, Northern Iraq.

## Contributions

### 11 February

Roundtable on EU Religious Freedom Policies, with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore.

### 16 February

Letter of solidarity of the COMECE President to the Conference of Bishops of Mozambique, following the dramatic situation in Cabo Delgado province.

### 2 June

Letter addressed to the EC President Ursula von der Leyen recalling the need of strengthening the office of the EU Special Envoy of Freedom of Religion or Belief.

### 12 July

Dialogue meeting on the global challenges facing religious freedom, with EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief Christos Stylianides.

### 27 September

Contribution to the Questionnaire of the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief.



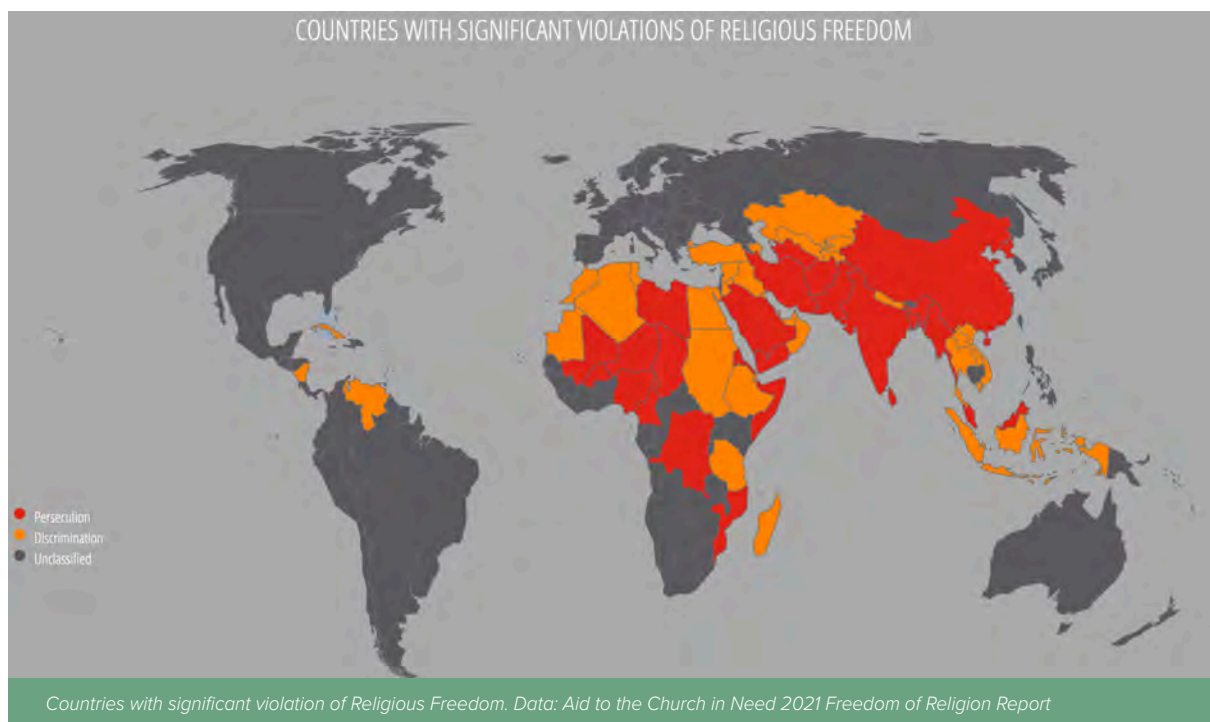
*Christos Stylianides, appointed EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion in May 2021.*

© European Commission



*October 2021 COMECE-ACN meeting with H.Em. Card. Joseph Coutts, Metropolitan Archbishop emeritus of Karachi (Pakistan), and representatives of religious organisations promoting Freedom of Religion around the world.*

© COMECE



*“Dear young people,  
do not be afraid of making decisive choices in  
life. Have faith; the Lord will  
not abandon you!”*

*(Pope Francis)*

# YOUTH POLICIES

**The contribution of young people is fundamental to consolidating European democracy and meeting the ecological, digital, and inclusive transitions while recovering from the COVID-19 crisis.**

COMECE, especially in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, carried out various activities involving and empowering young people from across Europe, offering them a platform where they could reflect and formulate proposals expressing their “dream of Europe”.

In June, the first ‘Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe’ was held to address today’s most urgent issues in Europe.

In the same month, the Spring Assembly of the COMECE Youth Platform took place, reuniting ten Catholic youth organisations and creating a space for exchange and sharing best practices.

In October and November, COMECE and its partners organised the Interfaith Youth Convention “Striking a Deal for our Common Home”, gathering young representatives of different faith communities and EU representatives.



Cover of the Final Report of the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal organised by COMECE and its partners.



## COMECE Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe

Within the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, over 100 young people from all over Europe came together online on 3, 10 and 17 June to participate in the Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe organised by COMECE.

On the path drawn by Pope Francis' message on Europe, they reflected and formulated concrete proposals to shape their 'dream of Europe'.

The youth - delegated by the EU Bishops' Conferences - focused on three thematic areas: just Social recovery, Ecological and Digital transitions, Democracy and European values.

Among the many recommendations, participants proposed to better support young people from disadvantaged groups to participate in exchange programmes and upskilling courses.

Further suggestions can be consulted in the Convention report submitted to the proceedings of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The report is also available on the COMECE website.

## Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal

COMECE and its partners organised an Interfaith Youth Convention to reflect on the European Green Deal - which is a set of policy initiatives proposed by the EU Commission in December 2019 to make the EU climate neutral by 2050.

In October, over 100 young Europeans delegated by several faith-based organisations active at the European level, exchanged perspectives and ideas on the European Green Deal.

The young participants - all representatives of Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities - formulated proposals on five thematic areas.

They re-gathered in November for the second meeting of the Interfaith Youth Convention, which featured the extraordinary participation of the EU Commission's Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans.

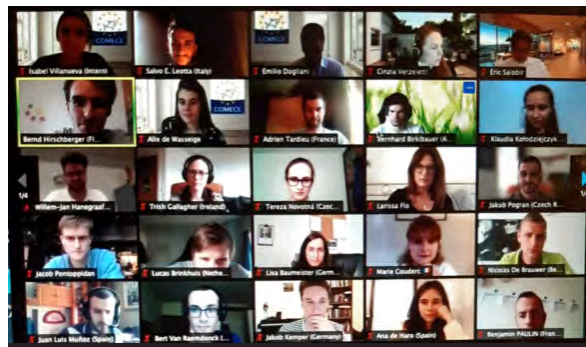
It was truly an event of dialogue, a unique opportunity to present young people's wishes and proposals on how to face some of the greatest ecological and social challenges of our time.

Vice-President Timmermans addressed these proposals. Possible pathways for their implementation were brought to the forefront of the discussion.



Screenshot of the EP Vice-President Roberta Metsola addressing the participants of the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal. The event was held on 25 November 2021.

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Screenshot of the COMECE Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe. The event was held online on 3, 10 and 17 June 2021.

© COMECE

The final report of the Interfaith Convention was published in March 2022. It contains 21 concrete proposals reflecting the commitment of young people of different faiths to a shared European project, the care for our Common Home, and their aspirations for the future of the European Union and its role in the world.

## The COMECE Youth Platform

Launched in April 2019, the COMECE Youth Platform gathers over 10 European Catholic youth networks and provides a space to share good practices, opportunities for training and capacity building, as well as to strengthen synergies in our advocacy work for the Common Good.

During this year's Spring Meeting, also on the wave of COMECE's other youth-driven activities, the Youth Platform devoted particular attention to its members' activities on integral ecology and the European Green Deal, as well as on youth participation, democracy and the future of Europe. The Platform also committed to following up on the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In the field of 'Youth Employment and Education', the partners agreed to work on the Youth Guarantee Cooperation, monitoring its future progress and raising greater awareness on mental health and wellbeing in working places - also in the context of increasing digitalisation of the EU labour market.



European Commission's Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans, in dialogue with the participants of the Interfaith Youth Convention in November 2021.

© COMECE

## Contributions

### 9 September

Report from the Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe: *'Our Dream of Europe'*.

### 10 December

Preliminary Report of the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal.

## Events

### 3-10-17 June

COMECE Catholic Youth Convention *"Our Dream of Europe"*.

### 23-24 June

Spring Meeting of the COMECE Youth Platform

### 1 October

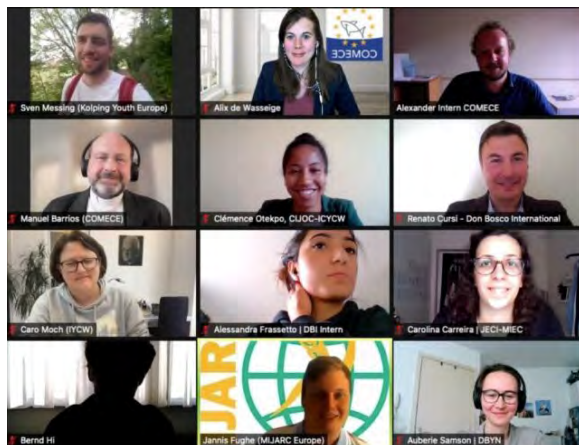
First session of the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal, co-organised with COMECE partners.

### 25 November

Final session of the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal, co-organised with COMECE partners.

### 7 December

Contribution to *"Die Konferenz zur Zukunft Europas: Was erwarten eigentlich die Kirchen?"*, event organised by the EKD-Büro in Brussels and the Europabüro of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.



Screenshot of the online meeting of the COMECE Youth Platform.

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# COMECE ASSEMBLIES

## and other major Bishops' meetings

### Spring Assembly, 17-18 March 2021 (on-line)

Bishops of EU Episcopates held their second online Assembly since the beginning of the current pandemic in March 2020. In dialogue with Margaritis Schinas, Vice President of the European Commission, the Bishops exchanged on some of the most pressing topics on the EU agenda, highlighting the need to work together in facing this historic period marked by the ongoing Covid-19 and climate crisis.

Together with VP Schinas, the Assembly discussed the current status of the recovery process in the EU and its Member States. They emphasised the importance of people-centred and value-based EU policies to protect the poor and the most vulnerable, especially in light of worsening socio-economic conditions deriving from the pandemic.

The EU representative – also the Commissioner responsible for Article 17 TFEU – acknowledged the commitment of the Catholic Church to promote the European project and conveyed willingness to move the EU-Churches dialogue towards policy-based exchanges.



COMECE President Cardinal Hollerich donates a copy of the book "I dream of a Europe..." to Pope Francis.

© Vatican News



Screenshot of the dialogue session between the EU Bishops and EC Vice-President Margaritis Schinas during the Spring Assembly held online on 17-18 March 2021.

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Bishop Delegates to COMECE attending online the Spring Assembly on 17-18 March 2021.

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## Autumn Assembly, 27-28 October 2021 (hybrid)

The Bishops of COMECE gathered in Brussels for their Autumn Assembly for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The event focused on the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) and the role of the youth in boosting the European integration process.

While renewing the support of the Catholic Church for the CoFoE initiative and its stated goal to allow citizens to debate on Europe's challenges and priorities, the Bishops highlighted the need to involve Churches and the youth at the local, national and European level.

A delegation of young people from all over Europe joined the Assembly to exchange views on key topics for the future of the continent.

## Meeting of the General Secretaries of EU Episcopates, 12 May 2021 (online)

For the fourth consecutive year, the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU gathered to nurture their cooperation with COMECE in view of a more effective contribution to the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the European institutions.

The meeting, held by video conference, was an opportunity to exchange on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in European societies and the Church, highlighting the importance of promoting a just and fair recovery from the pandemic.

Participants also discussed the involvement of the Catholic Church in the fields of: Freedom of Religion both outside and inside of the EU, demography, and COVID-19 vaccines for the most vulnerable.



*H.Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, President of COMECE, chairing the Autumn Assembly held in a hybrid format on 27-28 October 2021.*



*Some of the Bishop Delegates during the Autumn Assembly held in a hybrid format on 27-28 October 2021.*



*Meeting of the General Secretaries of the EU Bishops' Conferences held online on 10 May 2021.*

## Pope Francis receives the COMECE Standing Committee, 9-11 June 2021 (in the Vatican)

The COMECE Standing Committee had a private audience with Pope Francis to discuss some of the most pressing issues for the European Union and the Church, such as the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, ecological conversion, ELSiA and Laudato Si', the European Green Deal, EU migration and asylum policies, the Conference on the Future of Europe, and Article 17 TFEU.

The Presidency of COMECE also held several meetings with other Holy See representatives, including:

- H. Em. Mgr. Pietro Parolin (Secretary of State of His Holiness),
- H.E. Mgr. Paul Gallagher (Secretary for Relations with States),
- H.Em. Card. Gianfranco Ravasi (President of the Pontifical Council for Culture),
- H.Em. Card. Peter Turkson (Prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development),
- H.E. Mgr. Paul Tighe (Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture),
- H. Em. Card. Michael F. Czerny (Under-Secretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section),
- H.E. Mgr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage (Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue).

The visit was also an occasion to meet with Her Excellency Alexandra Valkenburg, EU Ambassador to the Holy See.



*Pope Francis and the COMECE Standing Committee in the Vatican on 9-11 June 2021.*

© Vatican News



*Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin receives the Presidency of COMECE in the Vatican on 9-11 June 2021.*

© COMECE



*COMECE President Cardinal Hollerich and Her Excellency Valkenburg, Ambassador of the European Union to the Holy See.*

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# COMECE PRESIDENCY

According to the statute of COMECE, the Presidency is composed of a President and four Vice-Presidents elected by the COMECE Assembly from among its members.

They are representatives of the geographical distribution of the Episcopates of the European Union. Their mandate lasts for a period of five years and is renewable only once.

The current Presidency:

- President: Card. Hollerich (Luxembourg)
- First Vice-President: Mgr. Crociata (Italy)
- Vice-President: Mgr. Treanor (Ireland)
- Vice-President: Mgr. Vokál (Czech Republic)
- Vice-President: Mgr. Overbeck (Germany)



*Card. Hollerich (Luxembourg)*



*Mgr. Crociata (Italy)*



*Mgr. Treanor (Ireland)*



*Mgr. Vokál (Czech Republic)*



*Mgr. Overbeck (Germany)*



# BISHOPS DELEGATED TO COMECE

COMECE members are the Episcopal Conferences in the EU. Each member Bishops' Conference appoints a delegate Bishop to the Assembly of COMECE. A single Bishop represents Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The COMECE Assembly includes one observer member from each of the following Bishop's Conferences: Switzerland, Scotland, England and Wales, the International Bishop's Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

## H.E. Mgr. Lodewijk AERTS



Bishop of Bruges  
(Belgium)



## H.E. Mgr. Jozef HAL'KO



Auxiliary Bishop of Bratislava  
(Slovakia)



## H.E. Mgr. Virgil BERCEA



Bishop of Oradea Mare/Gran  
Varadino (Romania)



## H.E. Mgr. Antoine HÉROUARD



Auxiliary Bishop of Lille  
(France)



## H.E. Mgr. Nuno BRÁS DA SILVA MARTINS



Bishop of Funchal  
(Portugal)



## H.E. Mgr. Jean-Claude HOLLERICH



Archbishop of Luxembourg  
(Luxembourg)



## H.E. Mgr. Mariano CROCIATA



Bishop of Latina  
(Italy)



## H.E. Mgr. Theodorus C.M. HOOGENBOOM



Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht  
(The Netherlands)



## H.E. Mgr. Ferenc CSERHÁTI



Auxiliary Bishop of  
Esztergom-Budapest  
(Hungary)



## H.E. Mgr. Vjekoslav HUZJAK



Bishop of Bjelovar-Križevci  
(Croatia)



## H.E. Mgr. Joseph GALEA-CURMI



Auxiliary Bishop of Malta  
(Malta)



## H.E. Mgr. Philippe JOURDAN



Apostolic Administrator  
of Estonia



## H.E. Mgr. Adolfo GONZÁLEZ MONTES



Bishop of Almería  
(Spain)



## H.E. Mgr. Czesław KOZON



Bishop of Copenhagen  
(Nordic Bishops' Conference)



**H.E. Mgr. Manuel NIN, O.S.B.**



Apostolic Exarch to the Greek  
Byzantine Catholic Church  
(Greece)



**H.E. Mgr. Noel TREANOR**



Bishop of Down and Connor  
(Ireland)



**H.E. Mgr. Rimantas NORVILA**



Bishop of Vilkaiviškis  
(Lithuania)



**H.E. Mgr. Jan VOKÁL**



Bishop of Hradec Králové  
(Czech Republic)



**H.E. Mgr. Franz-Josef OVERBECK**



Bishop of Essen and Military  
Bishop (Germany)



**H.E. Mgr. Āgĭdius Johann  
ZSIFKOVICS**



Bishop of Eisenstadt (Austria)



**H.E. Mgr. Christo PROYKOV**



Apostolic Exarch of Sofia  
(Bulgaria)



**Observers**

**H.E. Mgr. Youssef SOUEIF**

(until June 2021)



Archbishop of the Maronites  
(Cyprus)



**H.E. Mgr. Markus BÜCHEL**



Bishop of St-Gallen  
(Switzerland)



**H.E. Mgr. Selim Jean SFEIR**

(from June 2021)



Archbishop of the Maronites  
(Cyprus)



**H.E. Mgr. Hugh (Edward)  
GILBERT, O.S.B.**



Bishop of Aberdeen  
(Scotland)



**H.E. Mgr. Zbigņevs STANKEVIČS**



Metropolitan Archbishop of  
Riga (Latvia)



**H.E. Mgr Stanislav HOČEVAR**



Archbishop of Belgrade  
(Serbia)



**H.E. Mgr. Janusz STEPNOWSKI**



Bishop of Łomża (Poland)



**H.E. Mgr. Nicholas HUDSON**



Auxiliary Bishop of  
Westminster  
(England and Wales)



**H.E. Mgr. Franc ŠUŠTAR**



Auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana  
(Slovenia)





# SECRETARIAT STAFF

The Secretariat ensures the continuity of COMECE's work. Its headquarter is in Brussels, Belgium.

A small team monitors and analyses developments in EU policies and initiatives and strives to contribute to the relevant processes. The Secretariat reports to the Presidency and the Assembly.

## **FR. MANUEL ENRIQUE BARRIOS PRIETO**

General Secretary

## **ALESSANDRO CALCAGNO**

Assistant General Secretary and Legal Advisor for Fundamental Rights and Article 17 TFEU issues

## **MICHAEL KUHN**

Senior Advisor in charge of Ecology & Sustainability

## **JOSÉ-LUIS BAZÁN**

Legal Adviser for Migration, Asylum & International Religious Freedom

## **MAREK MIŠÁK**

Policy Adviser for EU External Affairs

## **FRIEDERIKE LADENBURGER**

Legal Advisor for Ethics, Research and Health

## **EMILIO DOGLIANI**

Policy Adviser for Education, Culture & Youth Policy

## **ALIX DE WASSEIGE**

Policy Adviser for Social & Economic Affairs, and Youth Policy

## **STEFAN LUNTE**

Adviser, General Secretary of Justice and Peace Europe

## **ALESSANDRO DI MAIO**

Press & Communication Manager

## **MAUD OGER**

Personal Assistant to the General Secretary

## **CAROLINA DUCOING**

Office Manager

## **ALBERT AREVALO**

Logistical Support

## **CYNTHIA QUIJANO AQUINO**

Cook

## **OLIVIER COEVOET**

Volunteer

The Secretariat thanks **Cinzia Verzeletti** for her activity as coordinator of the European Laudato Si' Alliance (ELSiA).

The Secretariat also thanks the voluntary interns that assisted in the course of the year:

**Carlos Jose Ortiz de Diego** (Spain)

**Isabel Villanueva Moreno** (Spain)

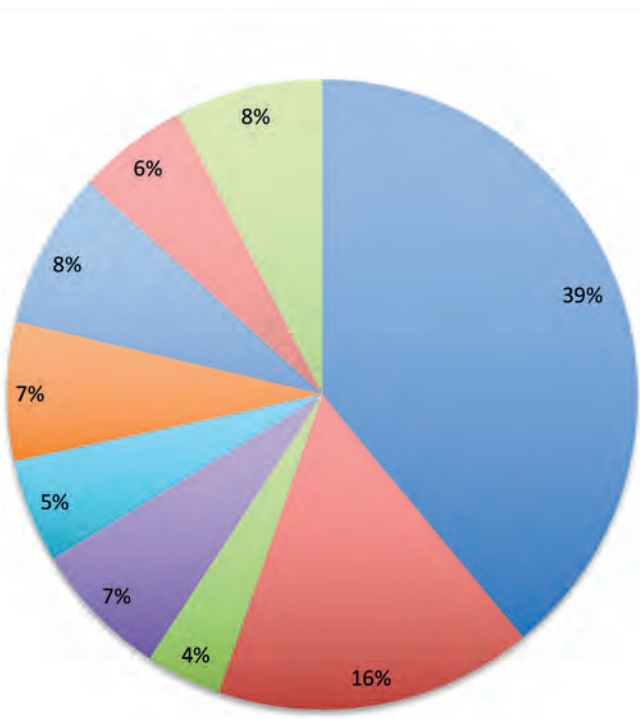
**Lidia Juhyun Kim** (South Korea)

# FINANCES

Total expenditure in the year 2021: **1.108.026 €**

The Secretariat of COMECE and its activities are financed exclusively by the contributions of its Member Bishops' Conferences.

The Secretariat of COMECE is registered in the EU transparency Register under the identification number: 47350036909-69



Rents, reception, travel costs, other salaries / 39%

Meetings and conferences / 16%

Ethics, Health & Research / 4%

Migration & Asylum / 7%

Social & Economic Affairs / 5%

Justice & Fundamental rights / 7%

EU External Action / 8%

Education and Culture / 6%

Communication / 8%

**Cover-large**

EU Council President Charles Michel, EU Parliament President David Sassoli and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen give a speech on the Future of Europe in Brussels (Belgium) on January 31, 2020. (Photo: Shutterstock)

**Cover-small**

"The Future is Europe" graffiti in Brussels, Belgium. (Photo: Novadead.com)



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