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# Priority issues for the Catholic Church in view of the European elections (6-9 June 2024)



A working document of the  
Commission of the Bishops'  
Conferences of the European  
Union (COMECE)

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# 1. Rule of law - democracy

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- The EU should support **intergenerational dialogue**, in order to create more cohesive and solidarity-oriented societies, favouring exchanges between younger and older generations and creating opportunities for citizens to make their voice heard in policymaking, thus shaping resilient and participated democracies
- **Rule of Law**: Churches and religious associations or communities should be fully integrated in the annual Rule of Law cycles at the national level, and violations of freedom of religion in the Member States should be part of the monitoring process.
- There is a need for additional EU tools to **counter fake news and disinformation**.
- EU policies on **transparency** should overcome the tendency to frame each and every actor that contributes to them as a *'lobbyist'* or *'interest representative'*. Concerning EU rules on access to documents, they should provide a better balance between the positions and interests of applicants and recipients of requests, ensuring accountability and transparency on both sides

## 2. Article 17 TFEU Dialogue

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- COMECE, together with its ecumenical partners, is firmly convinced that the process of **EU-Churches Dialogue** should be relaunched and reinforced, with a stronger commitment and greater creativity on the side of the EU institutions. The next legislature should lead to a qualitative leap, with new tools allowing Churches to also entertain a concrete dialogue on policy and legislative initiatives, not only on general themes and principles. This can be facilitated by the strengthening of the position of Commission Vice-President responsible for Article 17 TFEU dialogue and of the relevant Coordinator.

### 3. Fundamental Rights

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- **Data protection:** the GDPR and its implementation should continue to be subject to attentive monitoring. In case the Regulation is opened to changes, provisions that safeguard Church data protection activities - and in particular Article 91 - should be preserved, so as to ensure full compliance with Article 17.1 TFEU and with the fundamental right to freedom of religion.
- **Non-discrimination:** for this area - as well as for freedom of religion - it is important to overcome the logic that puts 'minorities' against 'majorities', implying that only the former are in true need of protection. Neutrality, inclusivity and respect for diversity cannot be instrumentalized to justify the exclusion of religion from the public square. In case of change to the Treaties, the unanimity requirement should be preserved for this area, due to the sensitivity and close link with national traditions and identities. EU law should ensure full respect for Church-State relations on the basis of Article 17.1 TFEU, in particular although not exclusively, for this area.
- **Freedom of religion:** the fundamental right to freedom of religion appears transversally - and will also do so in the future - in various EU legislative texts. Freedom of religion is neither a merely individual/private matter, nor is it limited to the exercise of worship. EU legislative initiatives should be attentively assessed for its possible impact on this fundamental right, including its public, collective and institutional dimensions.

- **Hate speech:** care should be taken that hate speech policies and legislation do not strike at the mere expression of ideas or at teaching, including religious one, and that a chilling/self-censoring effect on democratic debates and open discussions in society is prevented. Anti-Christian hate crimes and speech in the EU should be acknowledged in EU policies and instruments, including through the establishment of an EU Coordinator.
- **State aid:** for this area, we call for greater attention to the specificity of both Churches and non-profit organisations, which carry out - often irreplaceably - activities that are vital for healthy, solidarity and common good-oriented societies.
- **Child protection:** stronger instruments to fight child sexual abuse both online and offline are needed. The Church stands ready to support the EU institutions in making sure EU legislation is as effective as possible in countering this scourge. For the media sector, the Audio-visual Media Services Directive should continue to play an important role in protecting physical, mental and moral development of children. In general, the EU should promote the right of younger generations to a healthy online environment and counter addiction and overuse of Internet/new technologies.
- **Places of worship:** COMECE is alarmed at the rise of attacks on places of worship in the EU, including churches. It encourages the continued integration of protection of places of worship in EU public spaces/security policies, recognising their specificity and vulnerability while recalling that this goal should be linked with the exercise of the fundamental right to freedom of religion, not merely with the symbolic character of such places.

## 4. Family law and defence of human lives

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- **Cross-border family law:** a strict respect for EU and national competences, and of their division, should be ensured. In case of change to the Treaties, the unanimity requirement should be preserved for this area, due to the sensitivity and close link with national traditions and identities. With regard to ongoing legislative procedures, the proposed Regulation on Parenthood should allow for a sound recourse to public order by the Member States and not force them to recognise legal consequences of practices that are not legal in their systems, in particular surrogacy.
- COMECE advocates very strongly against the demand of integrating an EU fundamental right on **abortion** into the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. With a strong focus on the ethical dimension of EU fundamental rights and the ethical foundation of the European Union this discussion must be integrated also with the ongoing discussions of sexual and reproductive rights of women.
- A strong need is seen in the current political discussions for an intensive reflection on the necessary instruments at the European level to gain a better understanding for the need of better care and to achieve improved access in the context of **end-of-life situations**. The European level must ensure better access to palliative care and must improve the work towards enabling companionship for the vulnerable and sick. More technical input is needed on the topic of end-of-life care situations and their clinical, social and political connection to the 2022 EC Care Strategy and the 2023 EC Mental Health Strategy.

## 5. War and Peace

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### **The wars in EU's neighbourhood and deteriorating global security**

- Over the recent years and months, a dangerous arc of instability has emerged around the European Union, both to the East as well as to the South. We are [deeply concerned](#) about the disastrous humanitarian consequences of Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the pain of the Armenian people in the Caucasus region. We suffer with all the victims of the barbaric terrorist attacks perpetrated in Israel on 7 October 2023 and of the subsequent devastating violence unfolding in Palestine. These conflicts, along with an increasing international polarization and eroding multilateral frameworks, are posing a great challenge to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.
- In this regional and global context marked by deepening divisions and increased tensions, the EU is called upon to offer a **renewed strategic vision for stability, justice and peace** to the European continent and to the world.
- As expressed in their recent [Statement on Peace](#), the Bishops of COMECE “*dream of a Europe which fully employs its potential to settle conflicts and to light lamps of hope, acting as a united, trustful and integrating force, cherishing democratic principles and the rule of law, within and outside its borders*”.

## The war in Ukraine

- While keeping a clear distinction between the aggressor and the victim, and maintaining European unity in the concrete solidarity with Ukraine and its people, including political, financial and humanitarian assistance, and supporting the right of Ukrainians to defend themselves from the unjustifiable Russian military aggression in order to live a life in dignity, security and freedom in their independent and sovereign homeland, COMECE calls not to cease seeking “*creative efforts for peace*” (cf. [Pope Francis](#)), by intensifying multilateral and multistakeholder diplomatic initiatives towards a sustainable resolution of the conflict, in view of a *just peace*. One that is in line with international law and respects the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and accountability, since lasting peace will only be possible on the basis of *justice* and *truth*.

## EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy

- Even in times of a ‘third world war fought piecemeal’, it is important not to fall into ‘a logic of war’, but to act in ‘a logic of peace’ (cf. [Pope Francis](#)).
- Renewing Europe’s vocation to promote peace in the world is both a moral responsibility and a commitment arising from the Treaties: “The contribution that a structured and vital Europe can make to civilization is indispensable for the preservation of peaceful relations, since world peace cannot be ensured except by creative efforts, proportionate to the dangers threatening it” ([Schuman Declaration](#), 9 May 1950); cf. also Art 3.1 TEU stipulating key strategic objectives of the EU: “The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values

and the well-being of its peoples”; and Art 21(2c) TEU: “preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders.

- Security is essential for peace if it aims at protecting human dignity. In the understanding of the Church<sup>[1]</sup>, peace is more than the absence of war and violence. It above all requires the establishment of an order which is based on justice, on integral human development, on respect for fundamental human rights and on the care of Creation. The EU should practice and promote these pillars of peace both in Europe and in the world.
- In view of harmonising the different understandings of the concept of *peace* across the Union, and to ensure that it is not reduced to its security dimension only, work on a “European Peace Strategy” (or a ‘European Consensus on Peace’<sup>[2]</sup>) may be encouraged, as a follow-up to the [EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy](#) (2016) and as a complement to the [EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#) (2022). Such an overarching framework document may provide the EU with the strategic guidance for a more effective conflict prevention and the promotion of human security and peace in a truly integral and coherent way. Moreover, such a Strategy may help to reinforce EU’s civilian peacebuilding policies, as well as strengthen its capacities in areas of preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, mediation and reconciliation. It may also

contribute to a better tackling of the “forgotten” or “invisible” conflicts and their humanitarian impact.

- While recognising the need for responsible and collaborative engagement on security by developing adequate means of European defence against threats of military nature as part of a comprehensive peacebuilding approach and as a last resort, we urge that strict public scrutiny of its compliance be ensured with the principles of necessity, proportionality, adequacy as well as the respect for human rights, the rule of law and ethical standards. Particular caution is called for automated defence technologies, such as uncrewed armed systems, whose development and deployment should only be conducted following a strict legal and ethical assessment on the basis of a clearly defined anthropological and ethical reference framework. Moreover, more effective, coherent and accountable regulatory frameworks for arms exports should be developed and implemented at the European level.
- Since building lasting peace requires both “*an art and an architecture of peace*” (Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*), together with other regional and international organisations, the EU should also strive for re-building an architecture for peace in Europe and globally, one that is based on mutual trust, solidarity and inclusive cooperation, and that effectively prevents violent conflicts from arising.

<sup>[1]</sup> Cf. Saint John XXIII, *Pacem In Terris* (1963); Saint Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967); Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Fratelli tutti* (2020)

<sup>[2]</sup> Cf. similar, already existing strategic frameworks on Development ([‘European Consensus on Development’](#)) and on Humanitarian Action ([‘European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid’](#)).

## 6. Social justice - fight against poverty - defence of the most vulnerable

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The EU has been confronted with challenges resulting in deep economic and social inequalities. In dealing with such pressing constraints, European policymakers are rightly struggling to find appropriate responses combining green and digital transitions, social justice and inclusion.

In this context, Europe needs to:

- Combine social justice measures with ambitious digitalisation and climate agenda, ensuring an approach of living well together with the care of our "common home".
- Promote fair and decent work for all, including safe and adequate working conditions, also for the 'platform' workers.
- Strengthen economic and social cohesion, by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the targets established.
- Increase access to rights for marginalised groups in order to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion.
- Aim towards an economy capable of responding to and reducing the current social fractures by encouraging the integration of the Social Economy into the strategies of EU Member States.

## 7. Digitalization - Artificial Intelligence

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- After the finalization of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act a strong focus will be needed for the implementation of these legal regulation and a broader holistic approach of the ethical dimension of using AI Systems in different contexts. Pope Francis underlines in his apostolic exhortation “*Laudate Deum*” the growing technocratic paradigm and says: “*Artificial Intelligence and the latest technological innovations start with the notion of a human being with no limits, whose abilities and possibilities can be infinitely expanded thanks to technology. In this way, the technocratic paradigm monstrously feeds upon itself.*”
- The historic achievements of AI in fields like healthcare and climate change must be further developed accompanied by a strong ethical discussion with all who develop and deploy AI.

## 8. Care for our common home

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- COMECE strongly supports the objective of a sustainable future of the European Union, and we believe that this is a task that requires the joint cooperation of all. The European Green Deal plays an important role in achieving this, and we acknowledge the efforts to attain its goals. As guardians of creation, we are called to work for a sustainable future to keep “*our common home*” liveable for our future generations.
- At the same time, our concern must extend “beyond a merely ecological approach”, as the climate crisis is, fundamentally, a “global social issue” that disproportionately affects those who bear the least responsibility for its causes (Pope Francis, [Laudate Deum](#) 3). The responsibility to solve the crisis must not be placed upon the most vulnerable and blames must not be put upon families with many children. “Births are not a problem, but a resource: they are not opposed to life, but for life, whereas certain ideological and utilitarian models now being imposed with a velvet glove on families and peoples constitute real forms of colonization.” (Pope Francis, [Address to COP28](#))
- The human person lies at the centre of all ethical considerations, including ecological ones. To reach the goals of the Green Deal it must thus be ensured that the transition will be a just transition, truly “*leaving no one behind*.”

- This concerns, for instance, the housing sector, and directives such as [ETS 2: buildings, road transport, and additional sectors](#) that will potentially have enormous (financial) consequences on owners of apartments, and thus also on tenants and the housing situation throughout the EU generally, which in many Member States is already precarious. [Energy poverty](#) is far from being extinguished and there exists an obligation to “[ensure accessible and affordable energy](#)”. The Social Climate Fund might help to mitigate some of the repercussions, but it has to be seen to what extent. There should also be a reflection upon setting up systems that might drive people into dependence on such funds.
- Another area with enormous importance for the next electoral cycle is agriculture: In reaction to the farmers protests in the beginning of 2024 COMECE released a [statement](#) in solidarity with farmers, sharing concerns for the sustainability of small and medium-sized farms and the future of our rural areas. At the same time, statistics show an ongoing decrease in the number of small and medium-sized farms, coupled with the risk of an ageing population of farmers. Farmers today face comparatively low incomes and long working hours, competition on the market (including with non-EU imports), high energy costs and inflation, growing uncertainty due to changing climate patterns, but also what is perceived as over-regulation and an influx of new policies with concrete financial consequences. It seems clear that solutions must be found that guarantee a secure and flourishing future for our farmers and a sustainable food system. But this will only be possible if farmers are placed in the centre of political

considerations, who often have a much better sense of the reality on the ground.

- In this sense, we welcome the Strategic Dialogue between the EU and key stakeholders from across the whole agri-food chain, formally launched by the European Commission on 25 January 2024 and we hope that this or similar dialogue formats continue and will mark the beginning of a new way of doing politics in the European Union. We also welcome the concrete steps that have been proposed to improve the situation of farmers in the short term, but also the proposed structural changes, e.g., to the CAP, that can help reduce the administrative burden especially for small-sized farms. More consideration should be given to the competition of less-regulated non-EU imports and thus to potential trade agreements.
- Politicians should put more efforts into finding creative ways to create jobs in the new sectors that can emerge through the energy transition, and climate adaptation, making sure that the transition will not lead to mass unemployment.
- Global responsibility: The price for the ecological transition in the EU should not be paid by the developing world, e.g., the partly horrible social and ecological consequences of extractivism. At the same time, we also have the responsibility to help developing countries to reach a certain economical standard, and this in a just and “*clean*” way.

## 9. Migration and Asylum

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- Effective implementation of the individual right to asylum is an international law obligation of all EU Member States.
- Promoting the cooperation with countries of origin and transit of migrants and asylum seekers, to ensure the respect of their dignity in every phase of their journey is important. At the same time, there is the need for more robust and decisive policies to address the root causes of migration. As reminded by Pope Francis in his last message for the [World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023](#), the EU should give its support to migrants' countries of origin to create a reality that allows their own population to live in safety and dignity in their country. *“Migrants flee because of poverty, fear or desperation. Eliminating these causes and thus putting an end to forced migration calls for shared commitment on the part of all, in accordance with the responsibilities of each.”*
- Regarding the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, there should be a clear practice to avoid the **abuse of detention**, which should always be a last resort; means to **minimise the suffering** of those who are in a more vulnerable situation (including early aged minors, pregnant women, elderly, people with disabilities or mental health disorders) should be increased; the reception conditions at the border should meet minimum standards of dignity and safety; there should be an **effective right to appeal** a negative decision at the border. **Possible return to unsafe countries** or areas should also be avoided.

- New safe and legal channels should be promoted, as well as circular migration.
- Fighting migrants' traffickers and smugglers and their accomplices and fighting any instrumentalization of migrants as a weapon for ideological, political or geopolitical purposes is necessary.
- Countering radical visions of migration (e.g. unrealistic totally open borders, disregarding the diversity in ethos and capacities of each society, or unjustified blaming of migrants as the source of all problems), while encouraging generosity of States and societies to welcome migrants who are willing to integrate and accept the fundamental values of the hosting society, including "*respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them*" ([Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2241](#)).
- Protection of family unity in all stages of the migration process is needed.
- Solidarity among EU Member States regarding the management of migration, considering their capacities, resources, and social ethos should be promoted.

## 10. Trafficking in Human Beings (THB)

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- Non-discriminatory access of religious communities and associations, as well as other Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) to public funding, including EU funds, for projects, to prevent and combat THB and assist the victims for their reintegration into society.
- Recognition and involvement of religious actors and FBOs in the design and implementation of policies to prevent and combat THB, including the promotion of prevention and assistance of victims through confessional schools and Universities.
- A total ban on surrogacy, and the inclusion of all its types (including the so-called “non-commercial”), as THB.
- The EU should develop a specific EU framework to combat forced marriages, that also impact young women and girls who are EU citizens or residents, who are brought to the country of origin of their families, forced to marry there, and return to the EU.
- The EEAS should develop EU Guidelines to prevent and combat THB and restore the victims’ dignity to be used by EU delegations.
- It would be important to enhance the EU external dimension of the fight against THB, and that the EU anti-trafficking coordinator launches an EU strategy combining the efforts of the different EU Member States in coordination with EU delegations in third countries.

# 11. International Religious Freedom

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- The EU should appoint a permanent EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, with a strong and clear mandate to promote primarily religious freedom (e.g., atrocity crimes against religious communities, impunity of perpetrators; freedom to convert, public expression of faith, fighting forced conversion; etc.), having sufficient financial and human resources to carry on his/her task. At the same time, the EU Special Envoy could become the reference point for EU Member States' ambassadors, commissioners, envoys, etc., on religious freedom.
- The EU should not neglect the religious dimensions of conflicts, but adopt a holistic and realistic view, recognising all aspects involved and giving them an appropriate assessment.
- The implementation of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion and Belief is questionable, and the EU is not transparent about this as it doesn't publish any report about it.
- The EU should be more consistent with its own rules regarding GSP+ benefits to countries which don't fulfil the legal requirements to receive this special status that allows imports with no customs' duties. This is particularly clear in the case of Pakistan, that systematically violates religious freedom and other human rights conventions, whose fulfilment are a condition to remain as GSP+ beneficiary country.

- The EU should give a more decisive role to religious actors in the EU, whose knowledge, expertise and interest is relevant to certain topics (e.g., their communities are the victims of intolerance or persecution in a particular country).
- EU sanctions usually affect in a disproportionated manner the vulnerable parts of societies, including religious minorities. The humanitarian exceptions to sanctions should be implemented efficiently, overcoming obstacles faced by banking, insurance and transport sectors, allowing to provide services to charitable organisations assisting minority religious communities.

## 12. EU enlargement

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- A credible and responsible EU enlargement process is of strategic importance for stability, prosperity and peace on the European continent.
- Europe is more than just “a geographic area” and the European Union cannot be reduced merely to its economic dimension, since it is above all *a community of peoples, sharing ethical and spiritual values* (cf. Saint John Paul II, [\*Ecclesia in Europa\*](#)).
- Building upon the [vision of Saint John Paul II](#) that “Europe is called above all to rediscover its true identity” as a community of reconciled nations open to others with “creative fidelity” to the fundamental values, one of [Pope Francis’ dreams](#) for the European Union is its ‘capacity to integrate’, its ‘commitment to openness’.
- In view of ‘completing’ the European Union, a successful EU integration process of the Western Balkan as well as the Eastern European countries aspiring to a future EU membership, should not only to be seen as a geostrategic necessity or an economic investment, but above all as a strong message of hope for the citizens of those countries, who have often had to endure hardships and sacrifices along the way.
- A citizen-centred, credible and fair EU enlargement process should, in a timely, adequate and concrete manner, respond to the reform efforts undertaken by the countries aspiring to a future EU membership, while avoiding any double-standards in their treatment, which, in turn, may

lead to frustrations and anti-European sentiments in the population. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that EU accession is a two-way process which also requires strong political commitment to systemic reforms led by local authorities and endorsed by local societies.

- The credibility of the EU accession process also implies concrete steps on the side of the European Union to become ready and able to welcome new members soon; a larger and more diverse European Union does not only require the re-thinking of certain political, institutional, administrative and budgetary questions, but it also calls for a deeper reflection on rediscovering our common value basis and the special bonds that unite us as a European family.
- We encourage European policymakers to launch such a reflection process, with contributions from religious communities as well as other stakeholders from the candidate countries. An inclusive and participatory dialogue on the unifying elements for our European community of nations and people, may not only help to foster the fundamentals of EU integration, but also to incline public opinion in European societies towards a more positive stance on EU enlargement.

## 13. External relations of the EU - Place and mission of Europe in the world

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- Europe does not only have a legal commitment arising from the Treaties (cf. in particular Article 21(1) TEU and Article 21 (2) TEU), but also a moral responsibility to contribute to a more peaceful, just, welcoming and sustainable world: “Europe cannot close in on itself. It cannot and must not lose interest in the rest of the world. On the contrary, it must remain fully aware of the fact that other countries, other continents, await its bold initiatives, in order to offer to poorer peoples the means for their growth and social organization, and to build a more just and fraternal world” (Saint John Paul II, [Ecclesia in Europa](#)).
- Europe needs to rediscover its role as a ‘bridge and peacemaker’, ‘as a source of development’ and ‘a promise of peace’ for herself and for the world (cf. Pope Francis during his [Apostolic Journey to Portugal](#), and Pope Francis [at the \(Re-\) thinking Europe Dialogue](#)).
- In a global context marked by eroding trust in multilateral forms of cooperation and a renewed ‘great power’ competition or even confrontation, the EU should act as a united, trust-building, stabilising and integrating force.
- While decreasing harmful dependencies on authoritarian and hostile regimes and reducing its external vulnerabilities, the EU should remain open to deepening alliances with like-minded partners in its neighbourhood and globally, in order to find effective responses to regional

and global challenges that impede sustainable development and peace, while putting the human person at the centre and avoiding forms of *ideological colonisation*. In this respect, we particularly encourage a further strengthening of a people-centred and fair partnership with Africa and Latin America, as well as a deepening of ties with the United Kingdom and fostering the transatlantic cooperation.

- Propelled by geopolitical considerations as well as by targets of digital and green transitions, the EU has recently declared its ambition to foster its access to a secure and diversified supply of critical raw materials, which is likely to lead to an increase of mining in resource-rich countries, many of them located in Africa and Latin America. This, together with a strong reliance on the private sector in a number of areas of international cooperation, and the risks this implies, should prompt EU policymakers to ensure adequate and enforceable safeguard mechanisms for high human rights, social as well as environmental standards, and to ensure corporate social responsibility and policy coherence. We also recall the commitment of the EU and its Member States to provide at least 0.7% of their Gross National Income as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.20% as ODA to the least developed countries.
- To overcome divisions and distrust within the international community, the EU also needs to reflect on creative ways of constructive, coherent and value-based engagement that can foster mutual trust. It is in the EU's DNA, with its broad range of policy areas and instruments - from diplomacy, trade, development assistance to its human rights and

climate policies -, to use them for the opening up of new channels of dialogue and cooperation, while remaining faithful to its founding values and principles.

- Moreover, in the light of the inter-connectedness of today's world realities, the EU should promote also globally a new way of engaging with non-governmental actors, including the civil society and religious communities, a form of “multilateralism from below”, as proposed by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation [Laudate Deum](#), “to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, and its lack of attention to fundamental human rights”. In this respect, we encourage the EU to implement in more systematic ways the provision of the current [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#), which stipulates that the EU shall “reach out to religious and faith-based actors and assess how they can be involved in the protection and promotion of human rights, in delivering the sustainable development goals, and in peace making, conflict prevention, reconciliation and mediation, and find synergies with ongoing UN initiatives“ .
- Promotion and protection of religious freedom in the world, bringing a positive perspective about the important social contribution of religions, free of political manipulation, to the common good of societies. Highlighting the importance of the full protection of all its dimensions (private, public; individual and collective, institutional), and also guaranteeing freedom of thought and conscience (including the right to conscientious objection) for all. Particular attention to what Pope Francis

named “polite persecution” and “ideological colonisation”. Real support to the EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, in staff and financial resources, and addressing key concerns, including persecution of Christians.

## 14. Education and training

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- Education and training policies are the basis of our civilisation, and allow to form mature, aware and engaged citizens, providing them with quality teaching, skills and competences to live and work for the common good. The EU, within its remit (Art. 165-166 TFEU), has the responsibility to support the Member States to achieve well-functioning, inclusive, resilient and holistic education systems.
- In order to achieve the aims enshrined in the Treaties, the EU should strengthen an understanding of education and training which seeks to promote integral human development, before highlighting competitiveness and employability; it should favour policies that foster integral education, comprehensive of intercultural, interreligious, interpersonal and social skills, as Pope Francis mentions in his [\*Global Compact on Education\*](#): “We should aim to impart an integral, participatory and polyhedral culture”.
- Member States should also **holistically** approach lifelong learning, promoting skills for the ecological conversion, human-centred and appropriate digital education, non-formal and informal education (e.g. for skills acquired in the family or in other settings, such as parishes, faith-based organisations and civic education providers). In the context of an increasingly important lifelong learning, adult education institutions of all types (including non-formal and private ones) should be strengthened in their mission to support citizens’ continuous learning, with respective recognition of their achievements (e.g. through EU-wide

micro-credentials). It is important that European institutions and Member States are aware of the commitment of the educational mission of the Church and involve faith-based actors when addressing policies concerning both formal and non-formal educational institutions.

- Through its multiannual financial framework (MFF) and its relevant budgetary lines, the EU should focus on supporting Member States where learners are suffering the most the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic as pointed out by learning outcomes, i.e. by strengthening first the acquisition of basic skills (mathematics, reading, science, humanities) and complementing such learning with further competences and skills acquisition. Such actions should always aim at fostering the dignity of each person and ultimately, achieve a holistic, resilient and future proof [European Education Area](#).
- Given the lack of teachers affecting many regions, the European Union should actively promote the teaching profession, jointly reflecting on actions to enhance jobs' attractiveness and support Member States in teacher exchanges, focusing on their competences and knowledge.
- Given the correlation between social inequality and underachievement, as well as early school leaving, the EU should put into place measures to further support most vulnerable learners, especially from disadvantaged socio-economic background. These learners should benefit from targeted teaching, learning mobility, exchanges and quality education. To achieve this, the EU should especially strengthen Vocational Education and Training providers in

their endeavours to facilitate school to work transition for disadvantaged learners and NEETs (not in employment, education or training).

## 15. Culture and heritage for Europe's unity in diversity

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- The European Union, in its remit deriving from [Article 167 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU), encourages and, if necessary, supports and supplements the actions of the Member States for safeguarding cultural heritage, reinforcing cultural exchanges and fostering artistic and literary creation, respecting the diversity of its cultures.
- In this context, support to culture and heritage in the EU should lead the way to promote cultural programmes that do not assimilate, rather empower Member States and their citizens to express their cultural and spiritual identity, in accordance with their historical, cultural and national traditions, with a special involvement of young people in the process (cf. Pope Francis, [Christus vivit](#), pt. 181).
- Citizens should be given the opportunity to rediscover Europe's religious, philosophical and historical foundations, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, through resilient, inclusive, knowledge- and competence-oriented education systems in each EU Member State, as well as a diverse array of cultural opportunities. The European Commission should include the reuse and renovation of churches in the framework of the *New European Bauhaus*, as it is one of the dimensions allowing to reach the aims of sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics promoted by the initiative.

- EU-fostered cultural actions should aim to resist the creation of a “*culture of walls*” (cf. Pope Francis, [Fratelli Tutti](#)) and “the individualistic culture that at times degenerates into a true cult of the self and the primacy of indifference” (Pope Francis, [Global Compact on Education](#)). Instead, they must always promote a “culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions” as recalled in [Fratelli tutti](#). Therefore, EU cultural initiatives must arise from a stronger commitment by Member States and the EU institutions to allocate more funds to the cultural and creative sector and foster transnational (and international) partnerships with strengthened cultural programmes, such as [Creative Europe](#), the [European Capitals of Culture](#) and the [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values](#) programme.
- The EU should promote the respect of migrants’ own culture, while creating a favourable context for the integration of migrants, including their duty to “*respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them*” ([Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2241](#)).





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