



*Minority Christian Populations in times of crisis:
Relations between Society, State and Church. Difficulties and Adversities
AIO Assembly – Helsinki (Finland)
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I would like to begin by thanking the President of the IAO General Assembly, Mr Ioan Vulpescu, for his kind invitation. I also extend my greetings to all the authorities present and to the distinguished guests gathered here today.

The question of minorities has always been of deep concern to Christians. Today, however, it has reached a critical point that calls for careful reflection and appropriate action.

At the outset, it is important to distinguish between two different situations. There are countries, including some in Europe, where Christian minorities have existed for centuries. In some cases, different Christian denominations have coexisted as minorities within the same national context. A quite different situation is found in those countries where Christianity itself is gradually becoming, or is likely soon to become, a social minority. This is due to a decline in religious practice, a reduction in the number of ordained ministers, a diminishing public role for the Churches, as well as demographic changes and immigration from regions where Christianity is not the predominant faith.

In this second case, the challenge is particularly complex. The enduring strength of historical traditions and cultural patterns exists alongside profound social change. There is often difficulty—sometimes even resistance—in finding a stable and convincing balance between what has been inherited and what is emerging. Established generations may struggle to embrace change, while new forms of religious belonging can find it difficult to be fully integrated.

For this reason, in Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, as well as France and Germany; in Orthodox countries such as Greece and other parts of South-Eastern Europe; and in the Protestant countries of Northern Europe, we are witnessing a slow and multifaceted process. It is a process in which the persistence of tradition is accompanied by a gradual reconfiguration of Christianity within contemporary society.

At the level of social life and public culture, Christian minorities occupy a rather singular position. Even where Christianity remains the faith of a substantial proportion of the population, Christian history continues to be subjected to intense criticism. The mistakes and failures of the past are often judged according to the standards of a new rights-based culture, centred above all on individual rights and personal autonomy. What is commonly referred to as “woke” culture may be understood, at least in part, as an extension of earlier forms of anti-clericalism that emerged during the Enlightenment and later contributed to widespread secularisation. Today, these developments intersect with other social and cultural trends that are accelerating the movement of Christianity towards minority status in many European countries.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that many of the values that shape contemporary democratic societies were born and developed within the Christian tradition. Over time, these values have become part of the common moral and cultural heritage of Europe and have been enshrined in major human rights instruments, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Yet, once detached from their historical and spiritual roots, some of these values have evolved in a strongly individualistic direction. In certain cases, they have even become a means through which European and Western societies challenge aspects of their own cultural inheritance. One example can be seen in the strong commitment to defending cultural and religious minorities arriving from other parts of the world, particularly through migration,¹ while only recently has serious attention begun to be paid to the reality of anti-Christian hatred.

For this reason, COMECE welcomed and supported the appointment of an EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union.² At the same time, it continues to call for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on Combating Anti-Christian Hatred, a role whose establishment was itself proposed with the support of COMECE.³

Allow me, in conclusion, to offer two brief reflections.

The first concerns public institutions and the world of culture. We must resist the temptation to be carried away by currents of thought that are ideological in character, whether explicit or implicit. In a pluralistic society—one that reflects both the

¹ Cf. [Statement | COMECE ahead of EP motion for resolution on the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion - The Catholic Church in the European Union](#).

² Cf. [COMECE congratulates Mairead McGuinness on appointment as EU Special Envoy for FoRB - The Catholic Church in the European Union](#). Anche: [Statement of the EU bishops urging appointment of EU Special Envoy for Religious Freedom \[EN - IT - ES - FR - DE - PL - SK - HU\] - The Catholic Church in the European Union](#).

³ Cf. [COMECE at the European Parliament: "Time is mature for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred" - The Catholic Church in the European Union](#). Anche: [Speech-26052026-Adviser-Calcagno-speech-at-OSCE-workshop-on-anti-Christian-hatred-in-Europe-EN.pdf](#).

maturity of modern democratic consciousness and the extraordinary diversity of peoples, cultures and religions—the guiding principle of coexistence must be respect for freedom of conscience and freedom of religion for every person.

This freedom is the first expression of the dignity and inviolability of the human person. Its protection, for majorities and minorities alike, is an essential condition for civil coexistence and a vital guarantee for the future of our societies.

My second reflection concerns the Churches and Christian communities themselves. We should maintain a clear awareness—without presumption and certainly without arrogance—of the Christian roots of much that has made the European Union possible as a space of peace, progress, solidarity, freedom and integral human development. Yet I do not believe that this is the time for claims or demands. Rather, it is a time for renewal.

It is a time to cultivate the faith, ideas, practices and values that can once again make those roots vigorous and fruitful. In this task, dialogue is indispensable: dialogue among Christian Churches and communities, dialogue with other religions, and dialogue with public institutions at both national and European levels, including within the framework provided by Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon.

We should not be afraid of being, or becoming, a minority.

What we must fear instead is becoming insignificant: losing our capacity to contribute because of a weakening of our spiritual, moral and social vitality. Such a risk arises whenever we neglect to nurture what lies at the very heart of Christian faith and ecclesial life.

Thank you for your attention.