



Lunch discussion on
*“The Future of Jewish and Christian Communities in Europe:
Religious Freedom, Security and Belonging”*

Organised by the EPP WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
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Thank you very much for the invitation. I would like to approach our discussion from the perspective of one word in its title that I find particularly important: **belonging**.

When we speak about the future of Jewish and Christian communities in Europe, we rightly speak about **security**. And we must. Jewish communities across Europe are again facing an alarming rise in antisemitism, threats and violence. Christians too experience hostility, vandalism and attacks against places of worship, **even if the nature, scale and historical context of these phenomena are not identical and should not be artificially equated**.

Protecting people and places of worship is a fundamental responsibility of public authorities. But I would suggest that **security, indispensable as it is, is not enough**.

A community can be protected and still feel that it **does not fully belong**.

And perhaps this is one of the deeper questions facing Europe today: Can Jews and Christians live their religious identity openly, visibly and confidently in European societies? Can they participate in public life precisely as believers, without being regarded as remnants of the past, as a problem to be managed, or as citizens whose convictions are acceptable only when they remain private?

For COMECE, religious freedom is not a marginal or sectoral issue. It is a test of the quality of our democracies. It is possibly the most important value as it safeguards us from totalitarianism.

The real test of pluralism is not whether we make space for those who think as we do. It is whether we make space for convictions that we do not share.

Religious freedom certainly includes freedom of worship. **But it is broader than that.** It includes the possibility of educating, associating, expressing convictions publicly, establishing institutions and contributing to democratic debate. A genuinely pluralistic society should not ask citizens to **leave their deepest convictions at the door before entering the public square.**

In this regard, I believe Europe should avoid two opposite temptations. The first is the **instrumentalisation of religious identity**. Christianity, in particular, should not be transformed into a cultural or political weapon against migrants, Muslims, minorities or those who think differently. Christian identity emptied of the Gospel and used primarily to define who does not belong is a profound contradiction.

But there is also an opposite temptation: to consider religion **as something outdated** or inherently suspicious, perhaps acceptable in private life but **uncomfortable in the public sphere.**

We should reject both approaches. **Religious identity** should neither be **weaponised nor marginalised.**

There is a further point that I consider important from the experience of COMECE. Faith communities should not be seen only as vulnerable groups requiring protection. They are also **actors of social cohesion.**

Across Europe, Jewish and Christian communities create networks of trust. Churches and faith-based organisations run schools, hospitals, social services and humanitarian programmes. They accompany migrants, support families, care for the elderly, assist people experiencing poverty and loneliness, promote dialogue and contribute to peacebuilding.

In increasingly fragmented societies, **this capacity to create relationships, trust and a sense of responsibility for others is an important contribution to democratic resilience.**

This is also **why dialogue between public institutions and religious communities matters**. At EU level, **Article 17** of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides for an open, transparent and regular dialogue with Churches and religious associations and communities.

This dialogue should not be understood **as ceremonial, nor as a privilege** granted to religious actors. It reflects the recognition that these communities are part of European society and have a contribution to make to the common good.

I would therefore suggest that the future of Jewish and Christian communities in Europe cannot be reduced to the question of whether they are safe—essential as that is.

The deeper question is **whether they feel that they belong**: whether they can live their faith openly, contribute to society without suspicion, transmit their identity to future generations and be recognised not simply as witnesses to Europe's past, but as actors in Europe's future.

Europe will not strengthen social cohesion by asking religious identities to disappear. It will strengthen social cohesion by **learning how people with strong identities and deep convictions can live together**, respect one another and work together for the common good.

Perhaps that is one of the central challenges—and one of the great opportunities—for Europe today.