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COMECE at the European Parliament: “Time is mature for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on combating anti- Christian hatred”



In the context of the 27th edition of the European Prayer Breakfast held at the European Parliament, in Brussels, on Wednesday, 4 December 2024, COMECE contributed to the conference on “Safeguarding Religious Freedom in Europe – Current challenges and future prospects”. COMECE: “The time is mature for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred in Europe”.

Alessandro Calcagno, COMECE adviser for fundamental rights and Article 17 TFEU, outlined several EU Bishops' priorities in the area of freedom of religion. Calcagno highlighted the need to ensure equal protection to all dimensions of this core fundamental right, including the institutional one, allowing Churches and religious communities to function normally and without having to face bias or undue obstacles-interferences.

“Too often, freedom of religion is depicted as a ‘problematic’ right, and its collective dimension, compared to its individual dimension, is neglected. Tolerance cannot become a surrogate for the protection of the fundamental right to freedom of religion”, stated Alessandro Calcagno.

On religious symbols, messages and expressions, adviser Calcagno underlined that *“until they will be considered as potentially offensive to the sensibility of other believers or of non-believers, as well as a possible means of pressure on others, full protection of freedom of religion will not be ensured”*.

The conference also gave the opportunity to COMECE to stress the importance of better mainstreaming the protection of freedom of religion across EU policies – e.g. protection of places of worship, data protection.

The COMECE representative also highlighted that the right to freedom of religion, as well as provisions to fight against discrimination on grounds of religion, should not be seen as primarily concerning religious minorities. *“It is necessary to break the ‘majorities vs. minorities’ dynamic that underpins the approach of certain actors and policy-makers”,* explained Alessandro Calcagno.

In this context, he called on behalf of COMECE for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred. *“We consider that the time is mature for this step, while not questioning the specificity of Jewish and Muslim communities, which are already covered by similar Coordinators. It is not a question of victimism, but equal access to tools of protection”,* he said.

COMECE reiterated the positive role that religious literacy can play to promote and protect religious freedom and counter discrimination on grounds of religion. *“This also applies to public authorities and institutions, so that they can craft well-grounded policies and legal measures”,* continued Alessandro Calcagno.

At the end of the conference, COMECE emphasized that Article 17.3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), should be a tool to address concrete policy points as those discussed at the EP event, as opposed to general themes and principles.

The event was moderated by MEP Paulius Saudargas (Lithuania). It also featured high-level speakers like EU Coordinator on

combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, Dr Katharina von Schnurbein, MP and Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Dr. Gudrun Kugler and the Executive Director of The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe) Ms. Anja Hoffmann.

During the European Prayer Breakfast, the President of COMECE, H.E. Mgr. Mariano Crociata, offered a concluding prayer and blessed all participants.