

FRANCE: Four churches vandalised over the past week

– In one instance a tabernacle was broken into and its contents strewn on the ground

– Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner

HRWF (12.02.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2WZayC8>– France, over the past week, has witnessed a series of churches being vandalized and in some instances desecrated.

The vandalism took place in Nîmes, Lavaur, Houilles and finally in Dijon on Feb. 9.

In Lavaur and Houilles, the criminals only attacked objects and statues, but in Nimes and Dijon, they opened the tabernacle and threw the eucharist.

On Feb. 9 shortly after its opening, the sexton at Notre Dame Church in Dijon saw the tabernacle and the hosts scattered on the altar, a tablecloth rolled into a corner, a vase broken.

A Mass of reparation was celebrated that afternoon by Bishop Roland Minnerath of Dijon, preceded by a penitential rite, the diocese said in a statement, highlighting the “sadness” of faithful of this parish in the city center.

The series of attacks began Feb. 4 in Houilles, Yvelines. A statue of Mary was found broken in pieces on the ground, in the church of St. Nicholas.

Father Etienne Maroteaux, pastor of the parish of Houilles-Carrières-sur-Seine, again lodged a complaint, having already being subjected to violent attacks during the last two weeks that saw the altar cross thrown to the ground and the chair of

the celebrant wrecked.

The next incident took place on Feb. 5 at the Saint-Alain Cathedral in Lavaur, in the Tarn. The secretary of the parish who came to shut the cathedral found the smoking remains of the tablecloth of the altar of a side chapel, as well the nativity scene that was there, the fire had not spread, reports *La Dépêche du Midi*. A cross was also thrown down and the arm of the crucified Christ statue twisted to look like the famous gesture of the footballer Paul Pogba.

“God will forgive. Not me,” said the city’s mayor Bernard Carayon, whose town hall had just contributed to expensive renovations of the church building.

“I strongly condemn the vandalism of Lavaur Cathedral and I share the outrage aroused by this intolerable act,” said Jean Terlier, deputy of the district, while assuring the Catholic community of his support.

On Feb. 6, the police were called to the church in Nîmes.

The tabernacle was broken into and its contents strewn on the ground. Religious objects were vandalized and a cross was drawn on the wall with excrement, reports the local press.

Investigations are underway to try to find the wrongdoers.

See video on TV Channel France 2:

https://www.francetvinfo.fr/france/vandalisme-plusieurs-eglises-visees-par-des-profanations_3187009.html

Anti-Semitic acts surged by 74 percent from 311 in 2017 to 541 in 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvuY0TJBPeM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHx6ukPzb3g>

The strange shyness of the EU towards China

– by Marco Respinti –

A seminar of scholars and politicians in the European Parliament loses an excellent opportunity to put respect for human rights at the top of priorities –

Bitter Winter (02.02.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2DPRZs0>– In the second half of May, the member states of the European Union (EU) will hold elections to renew the European Parliament (EP), and it is logical that, one after the other, hot topics are surfacing. One of these is undoubtedly the relations that the EU has, and above all will have, with the other giants of the international political scene: for example, China. Especially in a historical moment in which the Asian colossus is overtly expanding its power and its grip through the Belt and Road Initiative in spite of the fact that, although it has been the protagonist of the dizzying and proverbial economic growth, it is now lagging behind in the midst of the recent slowdown in its manufacturing output, the decline of the renminbi (Chinese yuan) compared to the US dollar, and the clash on tariffs with the United States of America (the effects of which are also felt in the EU).

Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to have a seminar like the one organized by the German representatives to the EP, Jo Leinen, a Social Democrat, and Reinhard Butiköfer, of the Greens, respectively, president and vice president of the Delegation of the EP for relations with the People's Republic of China, entitled *Political values in Europe-China relations*.

It took place in the Altiero Spinelli building of the EP in Brussels on January 30, and featured Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova from the Latvian Institute of International Affairs in Riga; Alice Ekman from the Institut français des relations internationales in Paris; Mikko Huotari from the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin, Germany; Tamsas Matura, from the Corvinus University in Budapest, Hungary; Miguel Otero Iglesias, from the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid, Spain; and Tim Nicholas Rühlig, from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm.

Human rights not at the top of the agenda

That said, at the cost of appearing naïve, even very much naïve, one would expect that talks about political and commercial relations among countries cannot disregard the respect for human rights and the fundamental liberties of the person. If it makes sense that two despotic countries find it easy to understand each other politically and economically, it also makes sense to expect that a democratic state demands from its probable or possible political and economic partner to respect at least the standards of democracy that it personally observes. How can one think that a democratic country can deal at political and economic level with another if the latter arbitrarily imprisons, tortures, abuses and even kills its citizens? You do not need to be morally superior to understand that trading with a country where human dignity is trampled daily is not good for affairs; even cynics get it. In fact, everyone understands how economically risky, not to say detrimental, it is to maintain commercial exchanges – where all is based on trust, compliance with agreements, respect for rules and transparency – with a treacherous and double partner, used to acting outside the law, to lie and to subjugate rather than to benefit its citizens.

Why then (and here is all my intentional naïveté announced above), when it comes to relations between the democratic states of Europe and a totalitarian country like China, are

human rights not at the top of the agenda? The seminar of January 30th in Brussels, for example, didn't put them on top of the list.

Raise the stakes

Well, a few words were said, some facts were mentioned, but with the handbrake pulled, stealthily. As if the scholars who intervened knew, consciously or subconsciously, not to push things beyond a certain limit. One could say that this is the way scholars operate since they express themselves differently from activists. True, but only partially. Yes, scholars do their job in a different manner from that of the activists, and rightly so; on the other hand, even scholars are able, if they want to, to put things clearly. Of course, differently from activists, but certainly not in a less straightforward way.

After all, in the Brussels seminar, Mikka Huotari explicitly said that several things happening in China are incompatible with the standards that the EU countries are accustomed to. Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova has specified that Latvians have little sympathy for the model of government that dominates China as well as for the flippant approach that Beijing adopts towards international law. Tamsas Matura reported that, if Hungary looks favorably on China, it is not so for the Czech Republic and Poland, whose societies are amply impatient towards the "Beijing model", adding that, in these assessments, it is always necessary to carefully distinguish the attitudes of the governments from the orientations of the citizens. Alice Ekman has opportunely noted that, when dealing with China, one cannot take anything for granted so that each time it's necessary to make sense of the words defining their meaning. Rights, law, government, and freedom do not have the same meaning in China as in Europe.

But then, if the scholars who spoke at the seminar feel some uneasiness, and somehow reveal it, why can't we completely

turn priorities upside down (I am still intentionally naïve) and make way for respect of human rights and fundamental liberties of a person a binding paradigm of any other yet legitimate political and economic question? Why, in short, can't we start from those tenets, explicitly saying that as long as China does not change its attitude on human rights and fundamental liberties, there can be no partnership?

Now (and here my naïveté ends), in the globalized world, it is not possible to retreat in some splendid isolation. It is evident that, like it or not, the rest of the world has to come to terms with the Chinese economic power. But it is equally valid that the stakes can be raised, that the chip of respect for human rights can be put on the table. And it is not true that if one did it, China would leave the table: in order to trade, there must always be at least two.

Two kickers

Certain self-censorships are thus inexplicable. To scholars, who do not act in politics, it wouldn't cost much to speak openly. At the price of seeming idealists, they can afford it because they hold no political office, and if they speak frankly, they may even benefit from it.

For politicians, however, the price may be higher. They have an ideological agenda to follow and have no intention of affording themselves certain liberties. This is a mischievous statement of mine, but the conclusion of the Brussels seminar on Wednesday has helped to nurture it.

Some thirty minutes prior to the conclusion of the seminar, once the speakers had all given their presentations, Mr. Butiköfer, who acted as the coordinator of the table, opened the Q&A session. He collected all the interventions from the public and then gave back the floor to the speakers. Out of the many questions, two touched the hidden heart of the problem. The first (the first ever) was Ryan Barry's of the

Uyghur Congress in Munich, Germany: he asked if the news of the million (at least) Uyghurs that the CCP unlawfully detains for religious and ethnic reasons in the Xinjiang's "transformation through education" camps have had an echo in the European countries reviewed by the speakers. Another question was posed by a Chinese lady who asked if the politicians realized that any consideration on China couldn't ignore the fact that China professes a Communist ideology and practices a Communist ideocracy, which aims at total domination and degradation of people. At this point, two kickers followed.

The first was Mr. Butiköfer's management of the Q&A: he summarized all the audience's questions, inviting the speakers to choose their favorite to answer but omitting the two mentioned above, Uyghurs and Communism. Then, he gave the floor to the speakers in reverse order compared to their first run of interventions; they chose to answer everything but the two above mentioned questions, perhaps because the moderator omitted them. Thus, at time expired, with an attendant who signaled to Mr. Butiköfer that it was time to leave the room to a subsequent event, Mikka Huotari took the floor again. And here is the second kicker: he meritoriously recovered the unanswered question on Uyghurs. But at that point, there was no more time, and the question remained suspended in the void (the one on Communism never reappeared on the horizon).

CHINA: All religions are persecuted in China: the case

of Catholics (By B. Cervellera)



Brussels (AsiaNews) – *“All religions in China are persecuted”*: This is the conclusion of Austrian Member of Parliament, Dr. Josef Weidenholzer, at a conference held yesterday afternoon at the European Parliament in Brussels on the theme *“Religious Freedom in China”*. The meeting organised by representatives of the People’s Party and the socialists, had several guest speakers who offered their witness to a packed hall. After a brief introduction by parliamentarians Bas Belder (Dutch) and Christian Dan Preda (Romanian), the following spoke: Bob Fu, founder and director of China Aid; Kuzzat Altay, Uighur exile in the United States; Marco Respinti, director of Bitter Winter; Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights without

Frontiers; Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, editor of AsiaNews. From the audience emerged testimonies of Tibetan Buddhists, Taoists, sects, branded by the regime as "evil cults". Below we publish the intervention of the editor of AsiaNews.

AsiaNews (24.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2G70S0j>– In a meeting on religious freedom in China in the Brussels office of the European Parliament, the testimonies of Protestant Christians, Uighurs, Catholics. The voices of Tibetan Buddhists, Taoists and sects. The intervention offered by the editor of AsiaNews.

On January 14, AsiaNews published [a "Christmas diary" written by a Chinese priest](#), Fr. Stanislaus, who recounts the difficulties experienced by Chinese Catholics in a province of the Northeast. For "security" reasons Christmas Masses must be controlled by the police; young people under the age of 18 cannot take part; the New Year banners of good wishes, which the Chinese hang on their doorstep and with which Christians wish peace and blessings from God, cannot be sold.

On the same day, the foreign ministry spokesperson, Ms. Hua [Chunying], said: "You do not understand China. Do not you know how many Buddhist and Taoist temples and Christian churches in China operate legally? According to the law, Chinese citizens enjoy full religious freedom! We have taken preventive measures against terrorists and extremists, to allow so many ordinary people to fully enjoy normal religious freedom! "

Perhaps in China all young Catholics under 18 are considered "terrorists", forbidding them to attend Christmas Mass, Sunday Mass, and catechesis. To allow them to "fully enjoy religious freedom", in primary and secondary schools of various provinces of China (Anhui, Henan, Inner Mongolia), representatives of the Ministry of Education have forbidden pupils and students to celebrate Christmas (and the Lunar New Year), to exchange gifts or to participate in religious ceremonies; in several provinces (Hebei, Shaanxi,

Yunnan) Christmas celebrations and decorations were forbidden in the cities, seen as “an attack on Chinese culture”, a submission to Western “spiritual pollution”.

Apart from the historical error of considering Christianity as a “religion of the West” (given that Jesus was born in Asia and that Christianity arrived in China in the 7th century from Iraq), it is clear that the Chinese Communist Party is conducting a veritable “religious war” on Christianity and Catholics, all in the name of “security” and “nationalist patriotism”.

In the name of security

In the name of security, religious activities are divided into “normal” and “illegal”, although there are no differences in rite or execution between the two. What makes a religious activity “normal” is its submission to the control of political authorities: bishops, priests, places of worship registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs; registered publications; registered pastoral plans; registered times; registered participants. Added to this are the ubiquitous cameras in the parish offices; the permits to ask to meet Chinese or foreign Catholic personnel; the continued presence of the police around or inside the places of worship.

“Illegal” religious activities are those carried out with personnel or in places that are not under control. The Catholics who carry out these activities, defined as “criminals”, claim their freedom as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution, but risk arrests, fines, expropriation of buildings, or their destruction.

In 1994, the UN envoy for religious freedom, Abdelfattah Amor, asked China to eliminate this difference between “normal” and “illegal” activities, but this request went unheard.

It should be noted that this division – inserted by the government – creates the so-called official Church (of

“normal” activities) and the underground (or unofficial) Church.

The instrument of this division is the Patriotic Association, guarantor of “normality”, whose statutes violate the integrity of the Catholic faith because it wants to build a Church “independent” from the universal Church and the Holy See. Official Church members agree to register as the “lesser evil”; those of the underground Church categorically refuse to register. But both communities suffer violations of religious freedom and risk elimination: the former from a suffocating control; the latter from arrests, disappearances, killings, destruction.

The situation has become even more radical with the launch of the [New Regulations on Religious Activities on February 1, 2018](#).

Under the new regulations the official communities must submit to the control of the dimensions, colors and position of crosses; the height and position of statues; texts posted online, with a ban on the live streaming of all ceremonies. The underground communities do not even have the right to exist.

Activities carried out in unregistered places and with unregistered personnel are subject to heavy fines: between 100 and 300 thousand yuan for “unauthorized” activities (Article 64).

In addition to incurring fines, sites that host “illegal” activities will be closed down, seized and subject to forfeiture in state assets. For several months police and representatives of the Religious Affairs Bureau have been systematically meeting bishops, priests and lay faithful of the underground communities for “a cup of tea” and “to advise” them to register in the official communities.]

This explains the various “forced vacations” of [Wenzhou bishop](#)

[Peter Shao Zhumin](#), or [the indoctrination classes](#) of priests in Hebei, Henan, Inner Mongolia, ...

Underground bishops and priests are “advised” to register in the official communities, taking them to “forced vacations” or to “indoctrination classes”.

It is our duty to at least name the victims of this persecution: Msgr. James Su Zhimin, underground bishop of Baoding (Hebei), who has been missing in police custody since 1997; Fr. Liu Honggeng of Baoding, missing since 2015; [Fr. Wei Heping \(also known as Yu Heping\), who died in 2015 in mysterious and suspicious circumstances.](#)

There are also victims in the official Church: [Msgr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin](#), bishop of Shanghai, since 2012 in isolation and under house arrest for having dared to leave the Patriotic Association; [Fr. Liu Jiandong, of Zhengzhou](#) (Henan), expelled from his parish in October 2018 and forbidden to live as a priest, for having dared to organize meetings with young people even under the age of 18.

For all of this, since February 2018 many communities have been forcibly closed, [convents](#) and places of worship destroyed with bulldozers, [including some shrines](#) in Shanxi and Guizhou. It is estimated that in 2018 at least 30 Catholic churches have been closed and destroyed.

But there are also churches (official) that are destroyed in the name of urban expansion – as in [Qianwang and Liangwang \(Shandong\)](#) – and whose land is seized for building development without any compensation.

In the name of nationalist patriotism

Another method of submission and elimination of Catholics is nationalist patriotism, or [“sinicization”](#). According to the dictates of Xi Jinping, the Church must not only assimilate Chinese culture, and express its creed with Chinese

categories, but must create theologies, history, works of art according to the dictates of Chinese culture. Again it falls to the Patriotic Association to verify this is being done.

But the race for inculturation has also become iconoclasm with the destruction of works of art from the past (“too Western”) and that of external and internal church decoration, the demolition of crosses from bell towers, the destruction of domes and facades considered “not Chinese in style”. Patriotism obliges communities to hoist the Chinese flag on every religious building, to sing patriotic hymns before services, to hang a portrait of Xi Jinping even on the altars.

The provisional agreement between China and the Holy See, signed on September 22nd 2018, has not changed this situation. It is true that in some ways, the agreement is a conquest because for the first time in modern China history the Pope is recognized as head of the Catholic Church in China.

However, last December, Wang Zuoan, deputy chief of the United Front and former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, once again stressed that the principles of independence and self-management will not be eliminated “at any time and under any circumstances”.

In words reportedly shared with one [of these] underground bishop [s], the Pope is said to have referred that if the agreement was not signed, China threatened to illegally ordain 45 bishops “independent” from the Holy See, creating the basis for a real schism. The agreement was therefore blackmail.

In addition, immediately after the signing of the agreement, in many regions of China the United Front and the Patriotic Association held rallies for priests and bishops explaining to them that “despite the agreement”, they had to work for the implementation of an independent Church. The destruction of crosses, churches, indoctrination sessions, arrests continued just as before the agreement, if not worse.

Four conclusions

1. It is clear that the government and the Chinese Communist Party are engaged in a real religious war to oust the God of Christians and replace Him with the god-Xi Jinping, which implies a total submission to the Communist Party, a condition included in the New Regulations to nurture religion in China. In the name of the sinicization and subjugation religions are distorted until they become simple instruments of collateral support to the Party.
 2. What happens to Catholics, also happens to civil society and the business world. In recent years, control of media, social networks, the population, NGOs has grown ... and even in the business world, submission to the Party is required, on fear of kidnappings, arrests and convictions.
 3. China ploughs ahead undisturbed trampling on religious rights, civil society and commerce thanks to the indifference of the international community or the servility of many states which in view of possible, rapid economic gains with the Chinese market, turn a blind eye to these violations.
 4. The international community and the Chinese government suffer from myopia: they do not realize that religions – not only Catholicism and Protestantism – are spreading ever more rapidly just as esteem for Party politics is diminishing. The result is an erosion of Chinese society and a greater need for political and economic reforms. Ensuring religious freedom for Christian communities and other faiths could help China to achieve greater cohesion by saving it from chaos.
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The EU tolerates the exploitation of North Korean workers in Poland

EUReporter TV & Human Rights Without Frontiers Video Project

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Since the thaw of the relations between North Korea and the US as well as South Korea, the media have focused their attention on the denuclearization process of the Korean Peninsula and

have largely failed to report about the persisting egregious violations of human rights.

In October, at the European Parliament, HRWF and MEP Laszlo Tökes presented the film “Dollar Heroes” denouncing the exploitation of North Korean Workers by Pyongyang in Poland with the complicity of the Polish authorities.

Watch the video report of the screening of the film, interviews and the panel discussion, moderated by Dr Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy, with MEP Laszlo Tökes, Tristan Chytroschek (the producer of the movie), Prof. Remco Breuker (University of Leiden), Eun Kyoung Kwon (Open North Korea/ ICNK) and Willy Fautré (HRWF).

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– Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/wg0K0_XA6Vg

Panelists

Elisa Van Ruiten, a Gender Specialist at Human Rights Without

Frontiers International;

Mohinder Watson, a researcher and activist against child marriage, who escaped a forced marriage of her own as a teenager;

Emilio Puccio, the Coordinator of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights, which is a cross-party and cross-national group comprising over 90 MEPs and 25 child-focused organizations.

The presenter was EU Reporter's Jim Gibbons.

"Every day somewhere in the world, 39,000 young girls are married before they reach the age of majority; more than a third of them are younger than 15, according to the Council of Europe. We may be well into the 21st century but too many girls are still forced to live in a bygone age of male dominance. Human Rights Without Frontiers has just produced a report on women's rights and the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism."

EU Reporter – <https://bit.ly/2CTvNPh>

Next Programme about North Korea (November) –

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**Ukraine-Turkey: Turkish
secret services kidnappings**

in Odessa?

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges the Ukrainian authorities to confirm or deny this human rights violation perpetrated on their territory

HRWF (18.07.2018) – The well-known and reliable Odessablog has just released an article about two kidnapping cases allegedly perpetrated by the Turkish secret services under the title “Not such a Turkish Delight in Odessa” (17 July, <https://odessablog.wordpress.com>):

“It is no secret that foreign agencies work in Odessa Oblast.

The most obvious that would come to mind is that of the Russian Federation, but as a reader moves closer to Europe then the Romanian SIE is active, as is Mossad, and of course Turkey across the Black Sea also has a great interest in Odessa too.

To be fair there are numerous agencies active in Odessa as a reader would expect from a city that is a transport hub on internationally recognised trading routes (as well as internationally recognised smuggling routes – be it people, guns, drugs and counterfeit).

Odessa is a destination, it is a hub and it is a source of legitimate and criminal trade. It is cosmopolitan and it is mercantile.

What self-respecting foreign agency with particular regional interests wouldn't be active in Odessa?

Most go about their work quietly – albeit perhaps not as invisibly as they might think.

However, it appears that Turkey recently made some rather obvious and perhaps illicit renditions of two of its citizens.

If true this would not be the first time Turkey (or other

agencies – Mossad allegedly spirited away a Turk with Islamic links from Odessa train station some years ago) has tried and/or succeeded in renditioning their citizens from Odessa back to Turkey.

In 2008 several Kurds were either successfully renditioned or attempts were made by Turkey to “reclaim them” against their will.

The latest incidents allegedly occurred on 12th and 15th July 2018 – the first in Odessa and the second in Mykolaiv.

It is claimed that both individuals were FETO supporters (Güllist). That may or may not be the case, for rumours are rumours and who starts them and for what reason requires some thought.

Either way extrajudicial renditions are just that regardless.

On 12th July it is claimed that the Turkish Milli Istihbarat Teskilatı (MIT) abducted Turkish businessman Salikh Zeki Yigit from his restaurant in Odessa city centre, held him at the Turkish Consulate in Odessa overnight, and the following day spirited him back to Turkey (by plane to Istanbul and then on to Mersin).

The second individual was a Turkish blogger (married to, and father of Ukrainians) Yusuf Inan in Mykolaiv. Mr Inan was apparently subject to extradition proceedings, but it appears that the MIT could not wait.

Both men had residency status in Ukraine. Both were renditioned to Turkey during the last week if some very solid rumour be believed.

Whether a tacit blind eye was turned or whether the matter will be raised privately having drawn Ukrainian ire is speculative – particularly in light of recent Turkish statements thanking Ukraine for its “cooperation” regarding

the return of “refugees”.

What is not speculative at the time of writing is that there has thus far been no public statement from any Ukrainian institution or ministry – either to confirm or deny either incident.

Would a reader therefore draw inference that if these illegal renditions took place (and it appears that they have), in the absence of any official comment whatsoever, that Kyiv was aware?

The answer has to be – probably.

If so, and of course there is plausible deniability, it will be something of a human rights image problem at the very least in numerous private diplomatic conversations – albeit insufficient to cause any significant policy changes toward Ukraine (or Turkey). No doubt the Human Rights NGOs that read the blog (and there are certainly some in Brussels that do) will take note.

Whether there are any more Turks in Ukraine on the MIT rendition list – time will perhaps tell, and perhaps fairly soon.”

Local and national Ukrainian authorities cannot keep silent about the allegation of such an egregious human rights violation perpetrated on their territory. If the accusation is confirmed, they should take a public position about this act committed by a foreign power on the Ukrainian soil.