

Churches-EU Dialogue: COMECE and CEC meet with the Croatian EU Presidency

COMECE Press release (21.01.2020) – An ecumenical delegation composed of representatives from Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and the [Conference of European Churches \(CEC\)](#) met in Zagreb on Monday, 20 January 2020 with [Mr. Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of Croatia](#), to exchange on the priorities of the [Croatian Presidency of the EU Council](#), which started on 1 January 2020.

The delegation led by [H. Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ](#), President of COMECE, and [Rev. Christian Krieger](#), President of CEC, [shared a contribution](#) of Churches in Europe on key issues that the Croatian Presidency will address in the following six months. The meeting included the participation of representatives of the [Croatian Catholic Bishops' Conference](#) and CEC Member Churches from Croatia.

In the COMECE and CEC Contribution to Croatia's EU Council Presidency Programme "A strong Europe in a world of challenges", a section was devoted to religious freedom:

Religious freedom in third countries

The exercise of the fundamental and inalienable right to freedom of religion may be «subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public

safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others » (Art 18(3) ICCPR). As it is grounded in the inherent dignity of the human person, all dimensions of this right – individual and collective; private and public; as well as institutional – should be properly and fully protected. Churches in Europe note that the issue of freedom of religion has become an increasing concern in a number of EU Member States. This is related to the current sensitivity to presence of religion in the public space, as well as to a growing number of attacks on faith communities in recent years, many of them targeting Christian communities. (6) The EU holds a unique role in ensuring the implementation of its legal framework in this area. In January 2019, the European Parliament adopted the resolution supporting the strategic relevance of the function and calls on the Council and the European Commission to adequately support the “mandate, capacity and duties of the Special Envoy.” (7)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adopt targeted measures to protect highly vulnerable religious minorities in countries and regions where they are at risk of disappearing (e.g. Christians in the Middle East), collect evidence in case of international crimes committed against them, and promote and endorse national or international mechanisms to prosecute the perpetrators.
- Grant full political, social and financial support to make effective the right of Christians and other persecuted minorities, in particular in the Middle East, to remain in their home countries, and to return to them in dignity and safety as soon as possible; establish an international targeted fund to implement both basic rights.

- Ensure that the portfolio of the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU is continued and strengthened in its resources.
- Monitor the implementation of the EU action plan on public spaces, include religious communities in the dialogue with the Member States and provide the EU funding for the training of religious communities on the matter of public safety.

Brussels, January 2020

(6) E.g. murder of Fr. Jacques Hamel in Normandy in July 2016, the bombing of churches on Easter Sunday March 2016 in Lahore, the narrowly-averted church massacre in October 2018 in Louisville Kentucky, terrorist attacks against churches in Sri Lanka during the April 2019 Easter Sunday Mass, periodic attacks on Koptic churches in Egypt etc.

(7) http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0449_EN.html#title1