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COMECE dialogue on Freedom of Religion with the Hungarian EU Presidency

[COMECE](#) (21.10.1014) - The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) participated in the Article 17 TFEU conference "*Shared Responsibility: Cooperation Between States and Religious Communities in Europe*," held in Budapest on Friday, 18 October 2024, under the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council.

During the event, Alessandro Calcagno, COMECE Adviser for Fundamental Rights and Article 17 TFEU matters, emphasised that similar events – where EU Presidencies engage in dialogue with Churches under Article 17 TFEU – should "*be a regular feature of each EU semester and not be dependent solely on the goodwill of each rotating EU Presidency*".

Calcagno particularly focused on Freedom of Religion and its protection within the EU, addressing all its dimensions, including the institutional one. He also stressed that "*tolerance cannot replace the effective protection of fundamental rights*" and called on the EU to take urgent action against intolerance and discrimination toward Christians in Europe, advocating for the appointment of an EU Coordinator responsible for this matter.

Regarding places of worship, the COMECE representative highlighted that their protection is important not only due to their symbolic significance, but also for their essential role in ensuring the exercise of the fundamental right to freedom of religion.

More reforms needed to address unequal treatment among religious and belief groups

See the report of UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Nazila Ghanea in [English](#) and in [Hungarian](#)

[United Nations](#) (17.10.2024) – A UN expert said today that the broad enjoyment of the freedom to have, adopt and change religion or belief and associate freely on that basis in Hungary should be applauded but urged further reforms to ensure that all religious communities can operate without discrimination because of religion or belief.

“Although it was suggested that the preferential funding regimes to religion or belief organisations serve to partially remedy historical injustices, such an objective would call for a transparent and objective process,” the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Nazila Ghanea, said in a [statement](#) at the end of an 11-day visit to the country.

She said that one of her main tasks had been to assess the implications of the 2011 Church Law, which marked a major shift in the country’s previous legal approach to religion or belief organisations. This law had stripped the legal status from almost 350 religion or belief groups, significantly reducing the number of those officially recognised and greatly limiting their legal rights.

“The Church Law was amended in 2018 in response to both domestic and international criticism, and the new four-tiered system was introduced, but these amendments fell short of addressing the broader concerns about discrimination,” Ghanea said.

“I also found that although there is a sphere of protection in relation to a general physical security and integrity, hate speech, both in social and traditional media, is prevalent in Hungarian society,” Ghanea said. “This stretched from hate speech attacking Roma, LGBTIQ+, the unemployed and the poor, asylum seekers and refugees, and a range of religion and belief minorities,” she said.

The Special Rapporteur held meetings with Government officials and agencies in Budapest. She also met with members of Parliament, the Supreme Court (Curia), the Constitutional Court, prosecutors, police authorities, civil society organisations, representatives of religion or belief communities and faith-based actors as well as academics and writers. In Debrecen, she also met with local government representatives and representatives of religion or belief communities.

“In my report, I will elaborate on important areas such as the education sector, health sector, and other social services,” Ghanea said. “I will also pay attention to enabling freedom of religion and of belief in wider society as well as in institutional settings, such as in relation to worship, diet, access to religious guidance or chaplaincy in detention,” she said.

The expert will present a full report on her visit to the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2025.