

Mr Navracsics - Meeting with Archbishop Alain Paul Lebeaupin, Apostolic Nuncio to the EU Brussels, 1 June 2015

Background note

Religious values in the EU

It is difficult to get reliable statistical data on religious beliefs, but a Eurobarometer from 2012 can shed some light. The Roman Catholic faith is the most prevalent religion in Europe; 48% of Europeans interviewed (EU27) said to follow the catholic faith, 8% orthodox faith, 12% protestant, 4% another Christian religion and 2% Islam.¹

Over time, religious sentiments have gradually lost prominence in the EU. A 2010 Eurobarometer found that 51% of EU citizens state that they "believe in God", 26% "believe there is some sort of spirit or life force" while 20% "do not believe there is any sort of spirit, God or life force". In 1994, 59% (EU12) considered themselves religious persons, against 63% in 1982. Already in 1982, the lesser religious sentiments of young people were clear; 35% of young considered themselves not be religious vs 24% of adults.

Responding to which values the European Parliament should defend as a matter of priority, 20% of young people mentioned the dialogue between cultures and religions. (Eurobarometer on Youth 2014).

Commission's activities as regards religious groups

Over the past 10 years, the Commission has organised, every year, a high-level annual dialogue with religious leaders. The Commission also organises dialogue seminars with religious and non-confessional organisations on a variety of EU policy issues, including climate change, employment, poverty and social exclusion, citizenship or intergenerational solidarity. In 2011, a seminar was dedicated to youth, education and culture organised by BEPA and COMALACE (free masons).

Under the Juncker Commission, the responsibility for the dialogue is entrusted with First VP, Mr Timmermans.

EU funds for inter-religious dialogue

Erasmus+ supports capacity and cross-border cooperation of youth workers. The origins of youth work in Europe (19th and 20th century) actually often feature Church and Christian associations organising activities for young people.

Erasmus+ and the former Youth in Action programme supported many projects around dialogue and solidarity between young people, bridging differences in culture, social background or religious faiths.

Between 2007 and 2013, close to 900 projects have been supported dealing with inter-religious dialogue, focusing on young people directly or through youth workers. For example, a 9 day training course called "Faith Over Fear: The role and evolution

¹ Discrimination in the EU, Eurobarometer 393, 2012.

of religion in Europe and current issues facing European society" involving 40 youth workers from 10 countries took place in North East England in 2013. Through the project the participants gained a wider understanding of religious minorities and of the factors behind religious oppression which lead to phenomena such as Islamophobia. Furthermore, they are now able to better understand the role that religious minorities play in society, their make-ups, behaviours and fears, and became aware of factors to consider when involving them in local projects and activities.

EU funds to fight racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism

The Commission (but not DG EAC) provides financial support to activities aimed at fighting against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism on the ground, through a number of financial programmes. For the period 2014-2020 the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme has replaced the three previous funding programmes (Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, Daphne III and two strands of the Progress Programme - Anti-discrimination and Gender Equality) with a budget of EUR 439 million.

The Justice Programme is the successor of the three previous funding programmes (Civil Justice, Criminal Justice and Drug Prevention and Information Programmes). The budget for this programme is EUR 378 million over the period 2014-2020 and the programme will promote judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters, help train judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals.

DG EAC activities to promote fundamental values

Many of DG EAC policies and programmes are directly linked to the objectives of the Paris Declaration. The existing policy frameworks provide ample opportunities for **peer learning and exchange, dissemination of good practices on civic education, inclusive education, intercultural understanding**, as well as **youth participation and dialogue with young people**. These include:

- the **Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training ("ET 2020")**, in particular the 3rd strategic objective on "Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship"²
- the **European Youth Strategy** (2010-2018),
- the **EU Work Plan for Sport** (2014-2017), and
- the **Culture Work Plan** (2015-18).

The Commission will soon propose **new priority areas** in the ET 2020 and Youth Joint Reports, which will reflect a clear emphasis of the objectives of the Paris Declaration.

² 2009 Council Conclusions: "Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds."

To underpin these actions, the existing programmes (**Erasmus+ and Creative Europe**) will also be fully mobilized. Many ongoing projects supported by Erasmus+ and Creative Europe programmes already contribute to promoting civic values, enhancing inter-cultural understanding and inclusion, eg by supporting the mobility of teachers and youth workers, youth exchanges and volunteering, strategic partnerships in the field of education and youth, transnational networks, school cooperation platforms, joint projects on citizenship education, and collaborative partnerships in sport. Such activities will be stepped up and complemented with other actions in order to make an impact at a larger scale. All actions should be embedded in comprehensive, cross-sectorial approaches and implemented through reinforced cooperation with the civil society and social partners to ensure appropriate outreach and engagement at local level.

European Agenda for Security

The European Agenda for Security put forward by the Commission on 28 April 2015 specifically acknowledges the role of **education, youth participation, intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, and sport** in preventing radicalisation by promoting common European values, fostering social inclusion, enhancing mutual understanding and tolerance. It also stresses the importance of inclusive education, youth work, volunteering, sport and cultural activities in tackling inequalities, preventing marginalization and reaching out to young people.

The Communication refers to a **series of concrete actions** to be taken **under the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation on Education and Training ("ET 2020")**, the European Youth Strategy, the EU Work Plan for Sport and the Culture Work Plan.

It also announces that the Commission will mobilise funding under the **Erasmus+** and Creative Europe programmes, inter alia to support the mobility of teachers, and youth workers, youth exchanges and volunteering, strategic partnerships in the fields of education and youth, transnational networks, school cooperation platforms, joint projects on citizenship education, and collaborative partnerships in sport.