



Article 17 TFEU: Dialogue with churches, religious associations, and philosophical and non-confessional organisations

April 2022

In 1994, in an effort to build an ethical, moral and spiritual dimension into European integration and policy decisions, Jacques Delors launched the 'A soul for Europe' initiative, which resulted in the inclusion of provisions in the EU legal system allowing the EU institutions to hold regular structured dialogue on European issues with churches, religious associations, and non-confessional and philosophical organisations. Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provided the legal basis for this regular dialogue, held in the form of high-level meetings or working-level discussions. These meetings focus on policy issues on the European agenda, among them the Conference on the Future of Europe, AI, the Green Deal and the digital market. This digest presents a selection of relevant publications by the European Parliamentary Research Service.

Article 17 TFEU: Dialogue with churches, and religious and philosophical organisations

Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, April 2022

The EU institutions engage in regular structured dialogue with churches, religious associations, as well as with non-confessional and philosophical organisations, on the basis of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This dialogue takes the form of high-level meetings or working-level discussions, is focused on policy issues on the European agenda, and has its origins in earlier initiatives, such as that launched in 1994 by Jacques Delors – 'A soul for Europe' – which aimed at finding ways to build an ethical, moral and spiritual dimension into European integration and policy-making.

Russia's war on Ukraine: The religious dimension

'At a glance' note by Fearghas O'Beara, EPRS, April 2022

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 drew attention to the close relationship between Vladimir Putin's regime and the Russian Orthodox Church. The latter has backed Putin's war strongly and has long provided theological and ideological justifications for his domestic and international actions. The Russian Orthodox Church's overtly political approach has contributed to deep divisions within the wider Orthodox world, including a formal split with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and significant tensions with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The instrumentalisation of religion in Russian politics and foreign policy, including the interplay with orthodox churches in EU Member States, also has broader implications. This note is one of a series aimed at giving readers a deeper insight into the profound impact of Russia's war on Ukraine.

Religion and human rights

Briefing by Martina Prpic, EPRS, December 2018

Although the question of values has been on the EU agenda for decades, recent events, such as the migration crisis and the issues relating to the rule of law in some Member States, have brought it back into full focus. EU values are those of equality, freedom and respect for human rights. The principle of freedom of religion and

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belief benefits from significant protection under both EU and international law. Religion, represented by churches, religious communities and other entities, is also a significant factor in the protection and promotion of human rights, both in the EU and worldwide. International human rights bodies have even formalised the participation of religious entities, mostly through exchanges and dialogues, and the EU is no exception. The TFEU's Article 17, dedicated to dialogue with churches and religious associations, as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations, offers an opportunity for those groups to make their voices heard at EU level.

Further reading

Hagia Sophia: Turkey's secularism under threat

'At a glance' note by Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, July 2020

Jewish communities in the European Union

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, January 2020

Freedom of conscience around the world

Briefing by Philippe Perchoc, EPRS, October 2019

Ukraine: Religion and (geo-)politics: Orthodox split weakens Russia's influence

Briefing by Naja Bentzen, EPRS, February 2019

Combating anti-Muslim hatred in the EU

'At a glance' note by Martina Prpic, EPRS, November 2018

Faith-based actors and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

Briefing by Nora Milotay, EPRS, June 2018

The EU and faith-based organisations in development and humanitarian aid

Briefing by Philippe Perchoc, EPRS, November 2017

Religious organisations and conflict resolution

Briefing by Philippe Perchoc, EPRS, November 2016

EU action against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

'At a glance' note by Anja Radjenovic, EPRS, January 2016

Understanding the branches of Islam: Sunni Islam

Briefing by Beatrix Immenkamp, EPRS, February 2016

Religious fundamentalism and radicalisation

Briefing by Anita Orav, EPRS, March 2015

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