



EULEMA

EUROPEAN MUSLIM
LEADERS MAJLIS

Advancing Dialogue in the Spirit of *Article 17* *TFEU*

Breaking the Fast Together!

25 February 2026

*European Parliament
Bruxelles*





Advancing Dialogue in the Spirit of Article 17 TFEU *Breaking the Fast Together!*

Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides the framework for an open, transparent, and regular dialogue between EU institutions and churches, religious associations, and philosophical organizations.

This year, the observance of **Ramadan** and the Catholic season of **Lent** coincide, offering a powerful reminder of shared spiritual rhythms across traditions. While theological understandings differ, fasting across religions reflects common values: humility, compassion, self-restraint, gratitude, and a renewed commitment to justice and peace.

In this spirit, EULEMA is honoured to organize at the European Parliament an interreligious conversation with members of the European Commission and of the European Parliament on the **universal values of Europe**, focusing on **human fraternity** and the **dignity and freedom of religious pluralism**, followed by a reception for the breaking of the fast.

This offers a meaningful opportunity to translate this dialogue into a symbolic experience and into an inspiration for inclusive and active citizenship as a concrete model of **social cohesion** and as an **antidote to hatred, discrimination and ghettoization**.

In an increasingly multicultural and multireligious Europe, such shared experiences contribute meaningfully to mutual understanding and informed policymaking. Knowledge of religious traditions is not merely a matter of cultural literacy; it is a foundation for trust, respectful engagement, and inclusive public life — fully aligned with the European Union's motto, "United in Diversity."

*Welcome at the European Parliament in room ASP 1H1
Wednesday February 25th at 5 pm.*



Agenda Brussels, February 25th, 2026

European Parliament

Opening

- MEP **Antonella Sberna**, Vice President of the European Parliament
- MEP **Željana Zovko**, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
- MEP **Vangelis Meimarakis**, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue
- MEP **Dario Nardella**, S&D, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean
- imam **Yahya Pallavicini**, Chairman EULEMA

Keynote

- **Magnus Brunner**, EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration

Comments

- **Michaela Moua**, EU Commission's Coordinator on combating racism
- **Sarah Markiewicz**, IPU Inter-Parliamentary Union for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue
- **Ambassador Abdulkhaleq Al Yafei**, Permanent Observer of the OIC Mission to the European Union
- **Rabbi Moshe Lewin**, Conference of European Rabbis
- **Carlo Luyckx**, European Buddhist Union
- **Vincent Depaigne** EU Commission's Coordinator for Article 17
- **Marion Lalise**, European Commission Coordinator on combatting anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination
- **Tim Mortimer**, KAICIID International Dialogue Centre

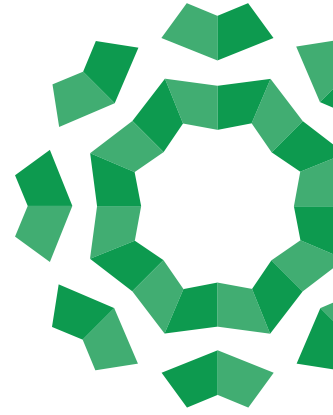
Reflections on Human Fraternity, Ramadan and Lent in Europe

- **Jose Luis Bazan**, COMECE, the Catholic Church in the European Union
- Imam **Yahya Pallavicini**, chairman EULEMA European Muslim Leaders Council

Reception and informal conversations



European Parliament



Antonella Sberna

Vice President of the European Parliament

Good evening, distinguished guests, dear colleagues and friends,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the European Parliament for this important moment of dialogue on religious pluralism, dignity and freedom in Europe.

In my capacity as Vice President of the European Parliament responsible for the implementation of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, I am honoured to co-host today's exchange together with Members Željana Zovko and Vangelis Meimarakis, co-chairs of the EPP working group on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in close cooperation with EULEMA, and with its recently confirmed Chairman, our dear friend Imam Pallavicini.

Congratulations, Mr Pallavicini. At a time marked by complexity and uncertainty, I am EULEMA's work and strengthen mutual understanding across our European societies.

Article 17 provides a clear mandate to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches, religious associations and philosophical organisations. This is a living commitment at the heart of the European project.

At a time of polarisation, geopolitical tension and growing mistrust, spaces for sincere encounter between communities of faith and conviction are more necessary than ever. Europe's strength has always been its ability to turn diversity into enrichment rather than division.

Today's gathering reflects this spirit. The presence of Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission and leaders from



different religious and confessional organisations sends an important message. Dialogue becomes real through daily practice, guided by responsibility, listening and mutual respect.

Interreligious cooperation plays a concrete role in strengthening social cohesion and fostering inclusive citizenship. Across Europe, faith communities contribute every day, often quietly, to solidarity, education, humanitarian assistance and the promotion of human dignity. Their engagement helps ensure that pluralism strengthens our democratic fabric, and cooperation with public authorities can support integration pathways.

This year, the observance of Ramadan coincides with the Christian season of Lent. Both traditions invite believers to embrace fasting, reflection and spiritual renewal. They call for humility, self-discipline and solidarity with those who suffer. These parallel journeys remind us of shared ethical ground.

At the same time, we are witnessing worrying manifestations of hatred targeting individuals and communities because of their religion or belief. Antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Christian prejudice, and discrimination against believers and non-believers undermine the foundations of our Union. They remind us that building respectful and cohesive societies is an ongoing task.

In our democracies, fundamental rights are meant to coexist and reinforce one another. Yet tensions can arise between freedom of religion or belief and other protected rights. Our responsibility is to seek balanced and proportionate solutions, while firmly safeguarding freedom of religion or belief for all.

It is important to recall that the United Nations International Day against Islamophobia is observed each year on 15 March. This occasion invites us to renew our commitment to combating prejudice and promoting a culture of respect.

Europe's younger generations are growing up in diverse and highly digital environments that can amplify polarisation. Investing in education for intercultural and interreligious dialogue is therefore essential. If pluralism is to thrive, we must equip young people with knowledge, skills and spaces to encounter one another with curiosity and respect.

The breaking of the fast that will follow our debate carries strong symbolic meaning. It reminds us that beyond our differences, a shared human experience can bring us closer through gestures of hospitality and fraternity.

Allow me a brief personal reflection. I come from central Italy. In Assisi, the body of Saint Francis will be publicly displayed for one month, a moment of deep historical and spiritual significance. Our ECR Group will visit next week as part of our reflection on the spiritual roots of European culture. I mention Saint Francis because he remains a symbol of the dialogue we promote today, a builder of bridges who calls us back to essentiality.

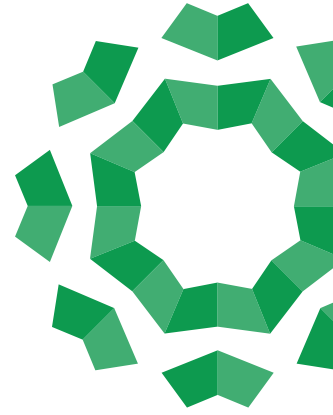
As our societies evolve, the Article 17 dialogue must continue to develop. Today's exchange is an opportunity to make this engagement more inclusive, more structured and more impactful in support of the Union's fundamental values.

This year Parliament is planning two seminars, in June and December. We would like to complement them with smaller initiatives together with our institutional partners, starting with the Commission, and with colleagues from the EPP, other

political groups, and the intergroups active on religious freedom. I remain open to further collaboration.

Let me conclude by expressing my sincere appreciation to EULEMA and to Imam Yahya Pallavicini for their continued commitment to dialogue and mutual understanding, and to my fellow co-hosts for their dedication to this agenda.

Thank you very much, and I wish you all a meaningful and inspiring evening.



Magnus Brunner

EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration

For fourteen centuries, the Iftar has brought Muslims together to break the day's fast. It is more than just a meal, it is the moment when community is created. Families renew their bonds. The rich often feed the poor, as part of the muslim traditions (*zakat*). For people who arrive in a new city, it can be a chance to meet neighbours and make new friends.

That is what we are in Europe: Christians, Muslims, or Jews, we are all part of one community. We may not all share a common past, but we share a common future together.

I say this with purpose, because I know that today this idea has come under strain. 'Diversity' has become almost a dirty word. And there are forces who want to pull us further apart. To create division instead of focusing on how much we have in common. To allow conflicts from outside the EU's borders to poison the friendship a Muslim and his Jewish neighbour.

Friends, we cannot allow that to happen here in Europe. My job in the Commission is to coordinate our efforts to fight against **anti-Muslim hatred**. We do this through our Article 17 dialogue with religious leaders. But I also want to mention the Commission's **new Anti-racism Strategy**. The Strategy is about fighting racism in **all** its forms, and that includes discrimination against Muslims.

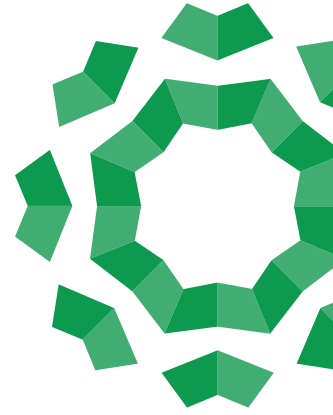
Because we all know, in Europe today, it is far too common for Muslims to experience discrimination – for example because they choose to wear the hijab. And we still have a problem of underreporting when it comes to crimes of discrimination, so it is important



that we, as leaders, continue to speak out.

One opportunity to do so is this year's Antiracism Conference, which will take place on March 17th. I have been in touch with my staff, to make sure that anti-Muslim hatred is addressed prominently in this year's Conference. And it would be useful to have your voices in the room as well.

This year Ramadan falls at the same time as Lent, and next week is the Jewish fast day of Ta'anit Esther. It reminds us of how much we have in common – fasting is a part of nearly every religion and every culture.



MEP Željana Zovko

Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue

Dear Vice President Sberna, Imam Pallavicini, dear colleagues, guests, and friends,

It is a great pleasure to co-host this event here in the European Parliament together with Vice President Antonella Sberna, my Colleague Co-Chair Vangelis Meimarakis, and Imam Yahya Pallavicini from EULEMA.

I am very pleased to welcome the distinguished religious leaders and experts, Ambassador Al-Yafei from the Permanent Observer Mission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the European Union, representatives of the European Commission, and colleagues from across this Parliament.

The EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue is honoured to participate in this interreligious conversation on the universal values of Europe — focusing on human dignity, fraternity, and religious freedom. Under Article 17 TFEU, we are committed to maintaining an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and religious organisations. This dialogue strengthens not only mutual understanding, but also democratic culture within our institutions.

Two weeks ago, our Working Group reflected on the meaning of Lent with the participation of a Jesuit father from Frankfurt. Today, we continue this reflection in a broader interreligious spirit.

This year, the seasons of prayer and fasting for Christians and Muslims rarely coincide, offering a powerful reminder of shared spiritual rhythms across traditions. While theological understandings differ, fasting across religions reflects common values: humility, compassion, self-restraint, gratitude, and a renewed



commitment to justice and peace.

Lent is more than a liturgical period. It is deeply embedded in Europe's cultural memory — a time of reflection, restraint, and preparation. In an era of constant acceleration — politically, technologically, socially — it proposes something profoundly countercultural: an intentional pause. For us as policymakers, this pause is essential. The complex challenges we face — from social cohesion to technological transformation and war on our continent — require discernment, responsibility, and moral clarity.

Traditionally, Lent unites prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Today, these can be understood as interior depth, self-restraint, and solidarity. In this way, spiritual reflection connects directly to social responsibility — something Europe urgently needs.

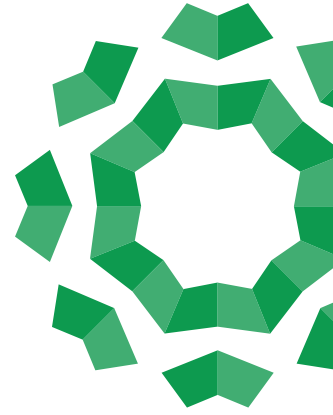
Reflection, repentance, and renewal are present in many religions. By sharing these traditions, we strengthen intercultural and interreligious understanding and reaffirm our shared commitment to human dignity and peace.

I thank Imam Pallavicini for launching this initiative and all of you for contributing to this dialogue. May today's exchange — and the breaking of the fast that follows — be a symbolic expression of our commitment to dialogue and to the universal values upon which the European Union is founded.

Thank you.



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.



Sarah Markiewicz

IPU Inter-Parliamentary Union for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue

Vice President Sberna,

Commissioner Brunner,

Co-Chairs of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, Ms. Zovoko and Mr. Meimarakis,

My friend, Imam Pallavicini,

Members of the European Parliament

Representatives of religions and beliefs in Brussels

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to attend this event on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global organisation of national parliaments, counting 183 national parliaments as members and the European Parliament as one of our valued Associate Members. I speak to you today as the IPU's Advisor on Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue and transmit the warm greetings of the IPU leadership.

The IPU's core mission is to work for peace, democracy and sustainable development, and it offers itself as a convener of dialogue and diplomacy for the parliaments of the world. The current strategy of the IPU encourages parliaments to adopt an ecosystem approach in their work, engaging with the actors and dynamics that influence them. This includes dialogue with the religious and belief diversity of society.



The IPU project on interfaith dialogue has a number of different activities. In addition to our research, reports and capacity-building webinars, we have been convening global Parliamentary Conferences on Interfaith Dialogue. These bring together parliamentarians, religious and cultural representatives, civil society, the United Nations and other experts from around the world to jointly address shared priorities, such as promoting peaceful coexistence, combatting polarisation and hatred based on religion or belief, and upholding freedom of religion or belief, gender equality and other human rights.

These Conferences – Marrakesh 2023 and Rome 2025 - concluded with joint commitments from parliamentarians which support parliamentary engagement with intercultural and interfaith dialogue to prevent polarization and violence, foster peaceful coexistence and inclusion, and reinforce strong, rights-based institutions in full respect of the rule of law.

The Conference in Rome last year during the Jubilee Year of Hope was organised together with the Italian Parliament and took place in the Italian Senate. We were greatly supported by Imam Pallavicini in its organisation, and we were honoured to have Vice-President Sberna contribute to this Conference. The Conference also included an audience with Pope Leo XIV, during the Jubilee of governments.

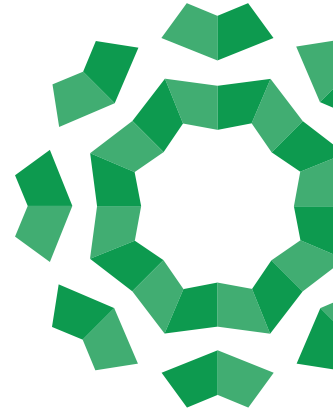
The IPU Interfaith Conferences echo the spirit of Article 17, being spaces for dialogue between parliamentarians from around the world, with representatives of the religious and belief diversity of societies, on the basis of the equal and inalienable rights and dignity of all.

The IPU continues to build on the recommendations of the Marrakesh and Rome Conferences. At the IPU's upcoming Assembly in Istanbul, we will be organising a workshop on Multistakeholder approaches to peace and reconciliation: legislative and faith-based perspectives. And we are currently finalising a toolkit for parliamentarians on Promoting religious literacy and inclusive citizenship.

The IPU is delighted to attend this dialogue and fast-breaking tonight in the European Parliament, and to celebrate the religious diversity of Europe. We continue our work to harness the potential of religious engagement to foster more peaceful societies.

Ramadan Mubarak and wishing everyone a wonderful iftar.

Thank you.



Vincent Depaigne

EU Commission's Coordinator for Article 17

I am honoured to join you, to mark Ramadan and together break the fast.

Coming after so many inspired speeches on the value of the Article 17 dialogue between European institutions and religious and non-confessional organisations, let me mention on point which seems to me so important in these times of polarisation and intolerance.

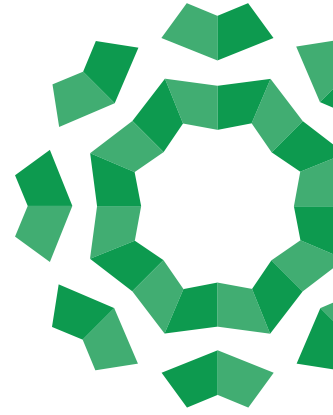
Today, we see, at the invitation of Imam Pallavicini, many religions gathered around the same table, as Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is are present with us today.

Such meetings, which we have come to regard as normal, in particular in the context of the Article 17 dialogue, but which remains difficult, if not impossible in many parts of the world.

This inter-religious dimension is a very important dimension of our dialogue and can only happen because the concerned actors are actively seeking this type of engagement and Imam Pallavicini must be praised for his leading role in this respect and the initiatives taken over the years, which ensure that the links created in peaceful times remain in more difficult ones.

This spirit of cooperation among religions is essential to ensure that the Article 17 dialogue is a fruitful and constructive exercise and as a signal of peaceful co-existence to the wider society.





Marion Lalise

European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination

The mandate of the European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination (Mandate of the Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred | European Commission) was established by the European Commission in response to the rise in discrimination, on and offline hatred against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

Anti-Muslim hatred is a real and systemic problem in Europe and globally. In recent years we have witnessed a steep rise in violent on and offline attacks, hate speech, with unfortunately also fatal consequences, including the brutal stabbing of Aboubakar Cissé in 2025 and incidents affecting mosques. Millions of Muslims live in Europe today, and for the most part they are able to enjoy the civil liberties and human rights of our democratic countries. However, as shown by the report “Being Muslim in the EU”, Muslims may experience discrimination in the workplace, when looking for a job, when seeking medical care or simply in the street. Discrimination and hatred may particularly affect women. Europe has witnessed worrying episodes of online and offline violence against people of faith, including Muslims and those perceived as such. Anti-Muslim hatred is still often under-reported and under-recorded, which underscores the need for trust-building and awareness raising.

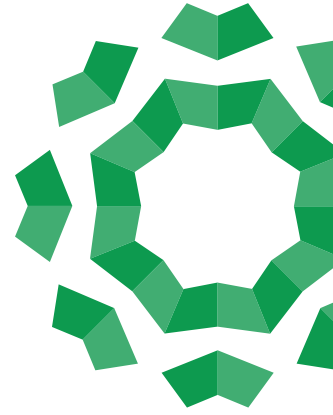
Fighting anti-Muslim hatred requires efforts and funding in the field of education, in the area of integration and social inclusion policies, as well as in the areas of employment and non-discrimination. The Coordinator is the main contact point for EU organisations working against racism and anti-Muslim hatred. Through the Office of the Coordinator, the Commission conti-



nues to raise awareness on anti-Muslim hatred, highlighting that it affects not only Muslims but also those perceived as Muslims. We encourage engagement and dialogue with Muslim communities and civil society to foster social cohesion, improve the recognition of their experiences, and counter misinformation and online/offline hate, and importantly also build trust. Our continuous work and efforts are anchored in robust laws and policies, as mandated by international human rights legal frameworks and instruments.

To this end, we have integrated concrete actions to address anti-Muslim hatred into the new EU Anti-Racism strategy (Anti-Racism Strategy - European Commission): by strengthening evidence collection, community engagement, and protection of Muslim places of worship within a broader framework for equality and social cohesion. The Commission is furthermore facilitating efforts to develop a working definition of anti-Muslim hatred by Member States and experts. In addition, we plan to conduct a comprehensive study of the manifestations of anti-Muslim hatred across sectors and EU Member States and propose concrete solutions. The EU supports a vibrant and resilient civil society. In this vein, we have increased our financial support for civil society organisations and EU Member States in combating anti-Muslim hatred.

We continue our international cooperation, including through organising the global Coordination Group, to seek solution on how to effectively tackle anti-Muslim hatred. On Monday, 16 March 2026, the EU gave a statement at UN General Assembly's High-Level Event to Commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia: EU Statement – UN General Assembly: High-Level Event to Commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia | EEAS.”



Michaela Moua

EU Commission's Coordinator on combating racism

Good evening, Commissioner Brunner, Vice President Sberna, distinguished representatives, and esteemed guests. It is an honour to join you at the European Parliament, especially as Ramadan and Lent converge, offering a profound backdrop for our discussions.

As the Anti-Racism Coordinator, I am pleased to announce the adoption of the first Anti-Racism Strategy on 20 January this year. The European Commission's Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030 is more than a policy; it's a promise to Europe's people — and it includes the commitments to tackling the racialisation of Muslims, stereotyping of religious communities, and hatred based on faith. These pressing issues manifest as discriminatory practices, hate crimes, and systemic barriers, threatening the dignity and rights of millions across our Member States.

Religious stereotyping, rooted in historical bias and fuelled by modern challenges, fosters division and alienation, allowing prejudice to thrive. Education is paramount in combating these stereotypes. By incorporating lessons on religious diversity and anti-discrimination into school curricula, we arm future generations with the knowledge and empathy vital for fostering inclusive societies. Moreover, engaging media outlets to ensure responsible reporting is crucial to avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes.

Discrimination on racial, ethnic, and religious grounds remains prevalent across Europe. The Commission champions robust legal protections and accessible avenues for victims to seek justice. Intersectionality matters, as many people face overlapping discrimination forms. Muslim women, for instance, may encoun-



photo by: commission.europa.eu

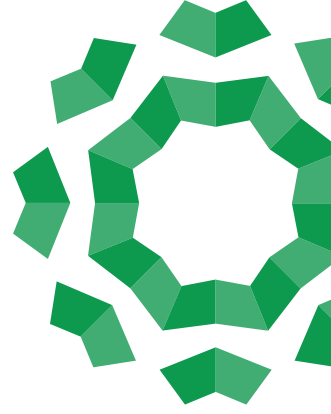
ter bias due to both faith and gender stereotypes. Addressing these issues requires approaches tailored to the unique challenges of marginalised groups.

Looking forward, implementing anti-racism measures across Member States demands persistence and collaboration. Strengthening social cohesion in a diverse Europe requires innovative solutions, but these challenges are not insurmountable. Together, we have the tools, knowledge, and commitment to make a positive impact.

I encourage each of you to carry the spirit of this dialogue into your work and communities. Let us be architects of a Europe that truly exemplifies its motto: "United in Diversity." Thank you



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة لمنظمة التعاون الإسلامي لدى الاتحاد الأوروبي



Ambassador Abdulkhaleq Al Yafei

Permanent Observer of the OIC Mission to the European Union

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct honour and pleasure for me, in my capacity as Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the European Union in Brussels, to participate in this important dialogue. I warmly commend the European Muslim Leaders Majlis (EULEMA) for convening this inter-religious exchange with distinguished Members of the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Today's gathering, centred on the Universal Values of Europe, is in essence a broader human conversation — one that brings together followers of many faiths and religious traditions. It is a conversation rooted in human fraternity, in the dignity of every human being, and in the freedom of religious pluralism, inter-religious tolerance, and mutual respect.

We meet at a spiritually significant time. Muslims around the world are observing the blessed month of Ramadan — a sacred act of worship and one of the Five Pillars of Islam — dedicated to fasting, reflection, prayer, and solidarity with those in need. This sacred period coincides with the Christian season of Lent, a profound time in the liturgical calendar commemorating the forty days of fasting by Jesus Christ — peace be upon him — who is deeply revered in Islam as a great Prophet of God.

These sacred occasions serve as powerful reminders of our shared spiritual heritage. They call us back to enduring values: compassion, generosity, self-discipline, fraternity, and our collective responsibility toward the most vulnerable members of our societies. They remind us that beyond doctrinal differences lies



a shared moral foundation — one that affirms human dignity, love, and peace.

These universal values must guide all societies, regardless of religious affiliation, ethnicity, or cultural background. They demand that we reject all forms of racial and religious discrimination and uphold the principles of respect for religious diversity. Within Islam, respect for other religions and their followers — regardless of their traditions, sects, or ethnic backgrounds — is not merely a social courtesy; it is a principle grounded in faith itself.

The Holy Qur'an affirms interreligious respect in clear terms:

- It calls for dialogue “in the best manner” with People of the Scripture (29: 46).
- It emphasises protection of monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques alike (22:40).
- It declares, “For you is your religion, and for me is my religion” (109: 6).
- And it establishes, “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256).

These Qur'anic verses, and there are others as well in the Holy Qur'an, reflect Islam's commitment to peaceful coexistence and freedom of belief.

In this spirit, we also recall the 2019 Document on Human Fraternity signed in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb — a landmark affirmation of interfaith understanding and solidarity.

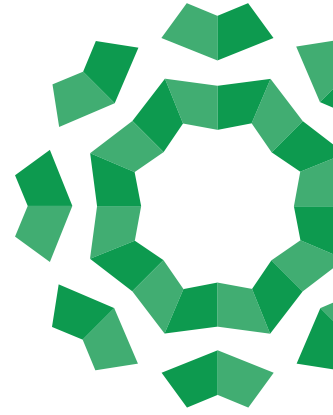
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me add to say that in times of global uncertainty, dialogue such as this is not optional - it is essential.

Finally, I would like to end my statement by mentioning that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in its Charter, promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue, fosters respect for diversity and peaceful coexistence between different religions and beliefs.

The OIC has also developed a formal Action Plan against Islamophobia as part of its broader strategy to combat discrimination against Muslims worldwide. The plan combines diplomatic, legal, educational, and media-based measures, and cooperation with international organisations.

With great pleasure I would like to express my thanks, and also the OIC's gratitude to the honourable organisers of this Dialogue, and commend their commitment to fostering mutual understanding; and for having given me this opportunity to speak in this very important forum.



Ambassador Antonio de Almeida-Ribeiro

KAICIID Acting Secretary General, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue

Tim Mortimer

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Distinguished religious leaders,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Allow me to offer my sincere apologies for not being able to join you in person this evening.

I would like to warmly congratulate Vice-President Antonella Sberna for her High Patronage of this event and for her leadership in advancing the implementation of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This framework for dialogue with religious and non-confessional communities is a safeguard for pluralism in Europe.

I extend my sincere thanks to the European Muslim Leaders Majlis, and to the co-chairs of the European People's Party Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, as well as to our partners across faith traditions who are gathered here today.

Dear all,

This year, Ramadan and Lent unfold at the same time, a meaningful convergence across Muslim and Christian traditions. Both are seasons of fasting, reflection and renewed responsibility toward others. Different paths, shared values.

It is a quiet reminder that our moral languages may differ, but our ethical commitments often meet and



that is where dialogue becomes powerful.

Today's gathering reflects a shared conviction that dialogue between religious leaders and policymakers is essential to the dignity, freedom and lived reality of religious pluralism in Europe.

KAICIID was founded on a powerful idea that States and religious leaders need to sit at the same table as partners, to prevent the misuse of religion for violence and oppression and to promote peace. The Centre's unique dual governance structure, uniting Member States, namely the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Spain and the Holy See as Founding Observer, with senior religious authorities across faiths and traditions is itself a diplomatic innovation.

Diplomacy alone cannot reach every community. Religion alone cannot resolve every policy challenge. But together, they can prevail. They can build trust where institutions struggle to reach and transform division into cooperation.

This is the essence of what we often call spiritual diplomacy, the ability of faith leaders and public institutions to work together through values, ethics, and moral leadership to strengthen social cohesion and counter hatred, discrimination and seclusion.

We see this approach working on the ground. In fragile contexts, religious leaders have opened spaces for reconciliation when political channels were blocked. Women and young people have bridged divides and turned grievances into shared commitments to peace. EuLeMa, as KAICIID's supported platform in Europe, is a powerful example of how interreligious cooperation can be formalized in a credible and constructive way within European public life.

The act of breaking the fast together this evening is deeply symbolic. In a political space shaped by policy and negotiation, this moment of shared humanity creates room for listening, trust and, above all, mutual recognition. It reminds us that religious literacy strengthens public policy and that understanding faith as a lived reality improves governance and social cohesion.

Ladies and gentlemen,

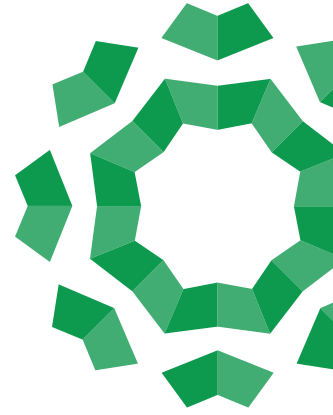
At KAICIID, we are proud to support initiatives that translate dialogue into practical cooperation and shared responsibility for the common good. We remain committed to accompanying

European institutions and faith leaders in advancing dignity, freedom of belief and peaceful coexistence.

I thank you for your leadership and your commitment to dialogue. I wish you a meaningful Iftar and a continued spirit of cooperation in the service of Europe's pluralistic future.



Tim Mortimer



Carlo Luyckx

European Buddhist Union

First of all, I would like to thank Imam Yahya Pallavicini, Chairman of EULEMA, for organizing this auspicious event and for inviting me to say a few words on behalf of the European Buddhist Union.

I would also like to thank Vice-President of the European Parliament Antonella Sberna as well as Commissioner Magnus Br unner for opening up the article 17 dialogue also for non-Abrahamic religions such as Buddhism. On planet Earth there are over 500 million Buddhists, and in Europe we count over six million Buddhists, which is, like for Islam, a constantly growing number. This growing presence of Islam and Buddhism should not be considered as a threat to the European way of life. On the contrary, it is easy to see that this is an enrichment for Europe. A culture can only become richer by meeting with other cultures. It is the same for religions and beliefs.

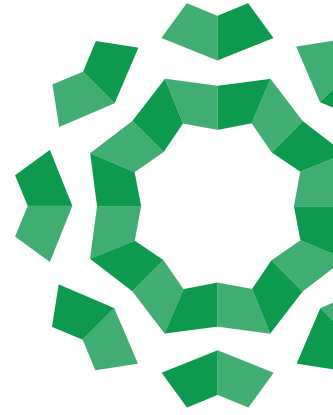
When His Holiness the Dalai Lama was last in Brussels in 2016, in front of a public of 10.000 people, he said: "Don't become Buddhists, you have everything you need in your own traditions to develop your spirituality and wisdom." When I engaged myself in Buddhism in 1971, the Tibetan Lama who initiated me said, and I remember like if it was yesterday: "You have to respect all other religions and beliefs". Respect is much more than tolerance.

The fact that Ramadan and Lent are coinciding this year is an auspicious sign. In Buddhism also fasting is a spiritual practice. It has nothing to do with self-punishment. It is rather considered a skilful means to cultivate clarity, discipline and compassion. In Theravada Buddhism, like in Thailand, Sri Lanka, etc., monks do



not eat after 12 o'clock. There are no general rules for common people except those one wishes to follow on one's own choice, like, for example, fasting on the full moon and new moon days. In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a practice called Nyungnes, which involves eating the first day one simple meal and the second day no food nor drink. Today also starts at one of our temples in Belgium, a retreat of eight Nyungnes, combined with meditation on Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva symbolizing unlimited compassion.

With best wishes for a fruitful Ramadan.



Rabbi Moshe Lewin

Conference of European Rabbis

I was particularly moved by the symbolic importance of gathering together in the European Parliament during Ramadan, around the shared values of dignity, responsibility and peace.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the work of EULEMA in fostering dialogue among religious leaders across Europe.

With my warmest regards,

Chief Rabbi Moshe Lewin

Vice-President, Conference of European Rabbis

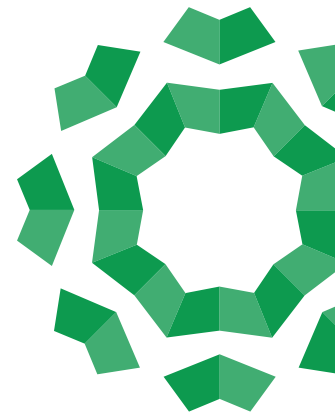
Special Advisor to the Chief Rabbi of France



Rabbi Moshe Lewin



Rabbi Albert Guigui



Jose Luis Bazan

COMECE, the Catholic Church in the European Union, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union

For Christians, Lent is a period of imitation of Jesus' 40 days in the desert, where He endured hunger as a sign of obedience and spiritual fortitude, and a liturgical season for the preparation of Easter that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at sundown on Holy Thursday. As Saint John Paul II said, "the aim of this particular period in the life of the Church is always and everywhere repentance, that is, conversion to God. Repentance, in fact, understood as conversion, that is 'metanoia', forms a whole (...) linked, in a certain way, with prayer, alms deeds and fasting." During Lent, we are invited "to a change of mindset, so that life's truth and beauty may be found not so much in possessing as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing and sharing goodness".

Fasting (meal reduction) and abstinence of meat is a voluntarily and conscious denying pleasure and comfort to turn more fully to God, as a sign of repentance and humility before Him. It also reminds the faithful of solidarity with those who hunger involuntarily and cultivates self-control over physical desires, aligning our thoughts, actions, and tendencies with God's will. To fast means to abstain, to renounce something, but not with a masochistic intention or in a spirit of moral superiority. On the contrary, it is a sign of humbleness and union: with God, with the vulnerable and dispossessed wherever they are, and all the suffering humanity; a willingness to serve and sacrifice for the good of others. It paves the way for spiritual maturity bringing the "fruit of the Spirit" to our lives and the lives of our neighbours. Fasting is "a season of conversion, a time of freedom" that enables us to leave behind customs that belittle or demean us as people, and habits that shackle us and undermine our inner freedom. It "involves being



freed from all that weighs us down (...) in order to open the doors of our hearts to the One who comes to us.”

Fasting is not a battle against the human body, but against its disordered tendencies that undermine our spiritual life. It “helps us to identify and order our ‘appetites,’ keeping our hunger and thirst for justice alive and freeing us from complacency,” and creates the virtue that enables us to live in harmony with ourselves, with others, and, above all, with God. Through fasting and other practices that bring us closer to God, we seek to honour the body, which, in the Christian view, is the temple of the Holy Spirit. That is why Saint Paul encourages us: “glorify God in your body”.

Today fasting is also a detachment from what might be defined a “consumer attitude” or “consumerism”, one of the characteristics of our Western civilization. Pope Francis called it a “dangerous disease”, and “a virus that tarnishes faith at its root, because it makes you believe that life depends solely on what you have”. John Paul II reminded us that diverse forms of consumerism “exploit the frailty of the weak, [and] tend to fill the resulting spiritual void.” A consumerist lifestyle has harmful consequences for the spiritual life. Unrestricted gratifying oneself with sensations makes us passive intellectually and reduces our spiritual capacity to search truth. In a warning message, Pope John Paul II declared that “modern man must fast, that is, abstain not only from food or drink, but from many other means of consumption, stimulation, satisfaction of the senses.” Leo XIV proposed, as a practical form of abstinence, “that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbour (...) and measure our words and cultivate kindness and respect”.

Every improvement in our spiritual clarity through our approach to the divine brings us closer to our fellow human beings, as we see that they not only have the same dignity as creatures made at the image of God, but that there is a real, vital, and indelible bond which, from a Christian perspective, means that every human being is part of our own family by God’s will. We must open our eyes to this reality and avoid the unnecessary distractions and noise, inside and outside ourselves, to recognize who we are and the invisible bonds that make us one, no matter the diversity of our cultures, religions, nationalities, or races.

In this regard, the Pastoral Constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*” (Second Vatican Council, 1965) declared that: “God, Who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, Who ‘from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth’ (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.” Because of our common origin and genealogy, humanity forms a unity as a family. In this way, we can say that the closer we are to God, the closer we are to man. To see God more clearly is to understand that the divine commandment to love God and love one’s neighbor is, quite simply, inseparable. This is not an accidental or secondary reality in the Christian perspective, but the core of our faith, that must be translated in deeds and commitments. “Communion with God and unity among all people, starting with believers, is our priority commitment”, said John Paul II.

In his Encyclical Letter “*Fratelli Tutti*” Pope Francis reminded us that “eight hundred years ago Saint Francis urged that all forms of hostility or conflict be avoided and that a humble and fraternal ‘subjection’ be shown to those who did not share his faith. (...) [He] was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the

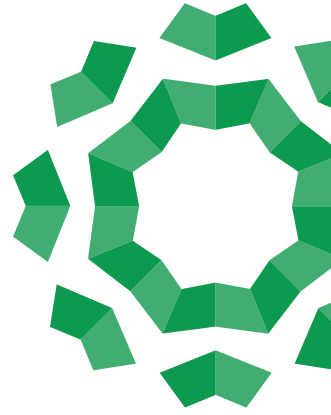
desire to wield power over others". Fasting time is not only a chance to increase self-control but also an opportunity to leave behind the desire to dominate others, which has been an immeasurable source of violence and suffering throughout the History. Unfortunately, during centuries religion has also fallen victim to those who have used it merely as a tool and who still use it to further their dominance and lust for power. It is important to highlight that "authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, human fraternity and harmonious coexistence".

This year we Christians observe this period of Lent's fasting and devotion alongside the Muslim communities' celebration of the month of Ramadan in a shared journey facing common challenges. In this period, we acknowledge our weakness but also our hope of renewal that "clears our inner vision and drives us to concrete acts of charity". This providential convergence in our respective religious calendars may help us to better understand that we have a common mission: "the sacred task of restoring peace to our broken world." This is not simply a desideratum or a nice dream but an actual responsibility towards our brothers in the world, for which -we belief - we will be held accountable before God, both for what we do and for what we fail to do. It is "by acknowledging what we have in common and respecting our legitimate differences, [that] we can lay a solid foundation for peaceful relations, free from competition and confrontation, and build effective cooperation for the common good". The Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conference (COMECE) remains committed to peace and social advancement also through regular and good cooperation with various religious actors and institutions from different faiths, among them the European Muslim Leaders' Majlis (EULEMA), in order to advance interfaith dialogue within the European Union and address in common the challenges facing European societies.

As Pope Francis said: "religions do not have the political force to impose peace, but, by transforming man from within, inviting him to detach himself from evil, they guide him towards an attitude of peace". Lent and Ramadan, as well as other religious practices, are instrumental to our spiritual advancement in that direction, because it is possible to coexist in harmony and in peace, no matter how far or difficult it may appear this goal. This is our hope, that includes but transcends human optimism and is rooted in the divine Providence that we need and seek. As John Paul II said in its 1992 Message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace, "peace is not only the result of skilful political and diplomatic negotiations or a compromise between economic interests but depends in a fundamental way upon the One who knows human hearts and guides and directs the steps of all mankind."



EULEMA
EUROPEAN MUSLIM
LEADERS MAJLIS



Imam Yahya Pallavicini

Chairman, EULEMA European Muslim Leaders Council

I would like to thank the European Parliament Vice-President, Antonella Sberna, and Commissioner Magnus Brunner for their active participation in this meeting and discussion. Your hospitality and presence are a great honour for EULEMA, the Council of European Muslim Leaders. I also want to thank the members of the European Parliament, the head of interfaith dialogue at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the coordinators of the European Commission for Article 17, against antisemitism, against anti-Muslim hatred and against racism. Being able to discuss these various issues and crisis areas is very important and allows us to jointly address the specific and broader context of social challenges in Europe.

I would like to thank KAICIID for the trust and support offered to EULEMA even before our registration as an International NGO in Brussels in 2022 and the recognition by Royal Decree from the King of Belgium and the Ministry of Justice. Our collaboration with the United Nations, the OSCE, the FRA, the Council of Europe, the Holy See and the MJLC has enabled us to jointly develop a model of responsibility and interreligious mediation that inspires and supports a virtuous and conscious process of peaceful social cohesion. Ambassador Antonio de Almeida-Ribeiro, thank you!

I want to extend special gratitude to my colleagues representing religious institutions: to the Ambassador of OIC, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; to COMECE, the Catholic Church in the European Union; to CEC, the Conference of European Churches; to CROCEU, the Committee of Representatives of Orthodox Churches in the European Union; to the CER, the European Conference of Rabbis; to the EBU, the European Buddhist Union; and to all the brothers and



sisters who accepted EULEMA's invitation to this gathering of knowledge, information and sharing regarding the breaking of the Ramadan fast at the European Parliament.

I take the chance to welcome the new member of the EULEMA Board, Sister Esmâ Uçan from Brussels. Together with Mufti Grabus, from Sarajevo, Imam David Munir, from the Central Mosque in Lisbon, Principal Suaad Onniselka, our focal point for Islamic education in Helsinki, Sister Amina Baghajati, an educator from Vienna, and my kind assistant Halima Rubbo, the Board members represent EULEMA at an institutional level within the European Union.

I would like to extend to all participants the greetings from the Muslim members of EULEMA in over 20 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

Observing the Islamic lunar month of Ramadan in Europe invites us to reflect on the roots and meaning of the name Ramadan. The masters teach us that the root of the term Ramadan in the Arabic language refers to the verb "to burn, to blaze," just like the symbol of the burning bush in the Bible. This comparison is well-founded when we consider that one of the defining characteristics of the month of Ramadan is precisely the descent of God's Revelation, which sends men and women a final message confirming what had already been conveyed to the communities by other Divine messengers. God speaks to the prophet Moses through the symbolic form of a burning bush, and in the month of Ramadan commands the prophet Muhammad to read, recite and interpret His Word of Truth in a heart that is pure and open to this communication.

As believers living in Europe, we find that we must learn to navigate this spiritual communication with the Word of God and with the universal language of the sacred fire that warms and illuminates hearts and minds. The masters teach us to safeguard this sacred fire and to prevent it from becoming the object of exploitation and fundamentalism, manipulation and misinterpretation, which rather than illuminating, can cause smoke and fires, darkness, disorder, hatred, abuse of power and violence. For this reason, religious leaders are dutifully sensitive and committed to security, social cohesion and the pursuit of true peace. We must defend the universal values of human life and safeguard the environment as a sign of God's miraculous and blessed creation of the world.

The ritual symbol of fasting is also common to other religious traditions; from Hinduism to Buddhism, from Judaism to Christianity, the practice of fasting is a sacrifice that adult, healthy believers offer as a time of abstention from food and drink. Muslim scholars remind us that fasting should not be understood merely as an abstention from food-related attachments or habits, but should find its proper expression in the pursuit of purity and honesty in both thought and action. Thinking less of oneself to better remember God and being more generous and charitable toward one's neighbour, especially toward the poor, the sick, widows and orphans.

Fasting thus becomes a further call to abstain from selfishness, greed, avarice and vanity. We must be open to recognize providence with gratitude and to foster sharing, equitable distribution and solidarity. This outpouring of generous and humble

grace is embraced by people, citizens and believers in Europe, who become attuned to the common good and to the spirit of human fraternity promoted in 2019 by Pope Francis and Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb. This brotherhood or fellowship of service is not only the antidote to fratricidal violence, but it is an opportunity to rediscover, through interreligious collaboration, a more open, complex and spiritually elevated human dimension. This interreligious fellowship or human brotherhood helps to dissolve and pacify animosities, resentment, or the ambitions of passionate pride that too often degenerate into political crises, indifference, unfair competition, barbarism and totalitarianism.

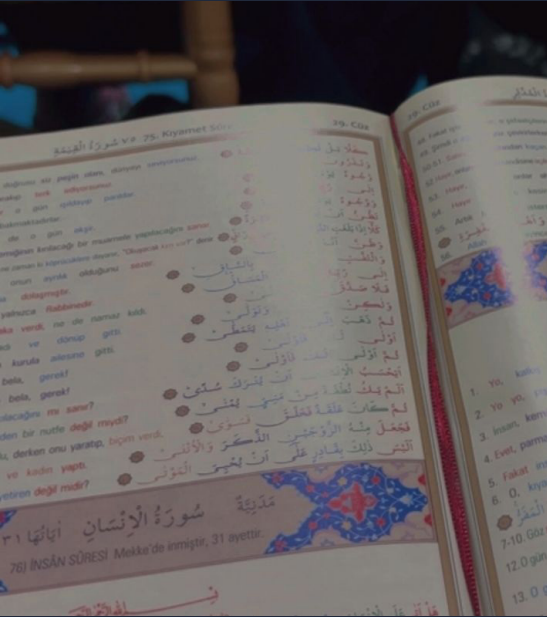
Engaging in religious dialogue with a broad cultural perspective is among the responsibilities of religious leaders in Europe, both with the new generations of citizens and with representatives of municipal institutions and the European Union. The development and maturation of European citizenship depend on respect for and the sound integration of the rule of law, international law and fundamental human rights, within which the freedom and dignity of religious pluralism stand as a core value of European society.

A new book by a fellow imam from the United Kingdom is titled "Values Do Not Fast." I believe that at this gathering we all agree with this title: values and virtues are the fundamental ingredients in the education and political governance of the life of every person, citizen and believer in Europe and throughout the world.

I invite you to join me in this brief break from fasting to taste together the richness of this cultural and spiritual convergence! Thank you and best wishes for peace!

Ramadan in Europe 2026

Belgium

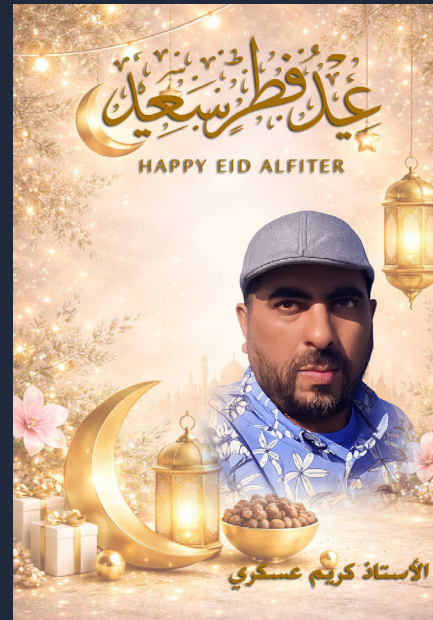


Bosnia and Herzegovina





Bosnia and Herzegovina



Iceland



Czech Republic



Denmark

Ireland



Eid Mubarak



France



Italy



United Kingdom





Slovenia



United Kingdom

Austria



Sweden



Thank YOU, to all participants!

Antonella Sberna, Vice President of the European Parliament

Magnus Brunner, EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration

Vangelis Meimarakis MEP EPP

Miriam Lexmann MEP EPP

Dario Nardella MEP SeD

Leoluca Orlando MEP Greens

Željana Zovko MEP EPP

Vincent Depaigne, EU Commission's Coordinator for Article 17 Dialogue

Nicola Censini, European Parliament's Coordinator for Article 17 Dialogue

Katarina Von Schnurbein, European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism

Marion Lalisse, European Commission Coordinator on combatting anti-Muslim hatred

Michaela Moua, EU Commission's Coordinator on combating racism

H.E. Abdulkhaleq Al Yafei, OIC Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the EU

Ambassador Antonio De Almeida-Ribeiro, KAICIID acting Secretary General

Vera Ferreira, KAICIID International Dialogue Centre

Teresa Albano, KAICIID International Dialogue Centre

Tim Mortimer, KAICIID International Dialogue Centre

Sarah Markiewicz, IPU Inter Parliamentary Union

Esma Uçan, EULEMA Board

imam Yahya Pallavicini, Chairman EULEMA

Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto, COMECE Secretary General

Jose Luis Bazan, COMECE, the Catholic Church in the European Union

Rabbi Moshe Lewin, CER Conference of European Rabbis

Rabbi Albert Guigui, CER Conference of European Rabbis

Job van Lobenstein, CEC Conference of European Churches

Rev. George Valcu, CROCEU

Stefano Bettera, EBU President

Carlo Luyckx, EBU European Buddhist Union

Constantinos Alexandris, EEAS

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Dimitrios Kremelis

Iria Feijoo Vazquez

Maria Luisa Fernandez Sanchez

Alessandro Spinelli

Halima Rubbo

Michael Privot

Mounif Kilani

Tyson Mutabazi

Perihan Cengiz

Maria Michela Laera

Tanja Florath

Jasmina Jakalova

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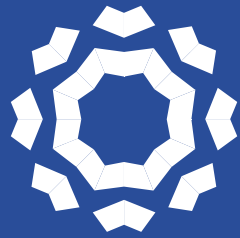
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