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UDK: 2-673.5:327.364(100)

322(100)

Review article

## POLICY ACTORS AND POLICY ISSUES FOR RELIGION IN PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND PEACEMAKING

### **Abstract:**

*The purpose of this article is to establish a connection between key policy actors and significant policy issues regarding religion in public discourse and peacebuilding within a broader context. The challenge lies in addressing the dilemmas surrounding whether discussions about religion, its impact on younger generations, and its role in peacemaking are solely influenced by religious factors, or if other social and political actors play a role as well. Through our research, we have identified ongoing political processes that have the potential to enhance religious dialogue and peacemaking on various levels. This mapping of actors and processes has been informed by literature, established academic and social networks like Culturelink (a Network of Networks for Research and Cooperation in Cultural Development, established by UNESCO and the Council of Europe), web searches, and interviews with stakeholders. The result of this analysis is a comprehensive list of over 300 actors documented in the RETOPEA Horizon 2020 project. We contend that current political processes offer opportunities to strengthen dialogue, which is more robust in some European countries but lacking in others when it comes to addressing issues related to the resurgence of religion in international politics and peacebuilding efforts.*

**Keywords:** Religion, dialogue, policy actors and processes, peacebuilding.

## Introduction

This article presents research conducted by the UKIM team as part of the HORIZON 2020 RETOPEA Project titled “Religion, Toleration, and Peace.” The focus of this research is on developing effective methods for utilizing and representing peacemaking processes through the analysis of historical, conceptual, empirical, and practical findings from various working packages (WP2, 3, and 5).

The main objectives of these work packages were to involve stakeholders in sharing information, research results, and initiatives in the following key areas:

- Identifying appropriate ways to utilize peace treaties and peacemaking in the media, including recommendations on accurately referencing historical settlements and the religious influence on contemporary peace-building efforts.
- Exploring effective methods for utilizing peace treaties and their representation in discussions surrounding religious coexistence, such as countering misrepresentations of historical events and using settlements to stimulate constructive public debates on coexistence issues.
- Investigating the use of historic peace treaties in modern peace processes, whether as sources of inspiration or as references to successful approaches from the past.

One of the tasks completed by the UKIM team was the Mapping of Relevant Policy Actors and Processes, which involved identifying key stakeholders from education, policy-making institutions, policymakers, experts, MPs, and NGOs who could contribute to enhancing religious dialogue and understanding their role in the policy-making process. This mapping exercise was based on a literature review, research on established academic and social networks like Culturelink, web searches, and interviews with stakeholders.

The ultimate goal of mapping and analyzing policy actors and processes is to develop a database containing the results of this exercise, which will be integrated into ODIS for use by professionals. ODIS is a platform that aims to facilitate access to information on cultural heritage and research.

According to Paffenholz, peacebuilding is the process of achieving peace, which can vary depending on one’s understanding of peace. Peacebuilding differs in terms of approaches, scope of activities, and time frame. This variability leads to different interpretations and definitions of peacebuilding in research and practice. From a conflict management perspective, peacebuilding is seen as a diplomatic and institutionalized approach to ending violent conflicts between parties. However, this approach may overlook the root causes of conflict and the potential for violence to reemerge. In contrast, conflict resolution aims to address underlying causes of conflicts by involving various international and

local civil society actors and focusing on rebuilding relationships between conflicting parties.

Critics have highlighted the limitations of both peacebuilding and conflict resolution approaches, emphasizing the need for a complementary approach that incorporates best practices from both. Religious actors play a significant role in peacebuilding, often being more involved in conflict resolution than conflict management. This involvement can include international charity and faith organizations providing assistance, as well as religious leaders participating in problem-solving and mediation efforts. John Paul Lederach is known for developing a transformation-oriented approach to peacebuilding, focusing on building long-term infrastructure for peace and supporting reconciliation within society. This approach aligns with the Conflict Resolution School's emphasis on rebuilding relationships and promoting reconciliation.

In Paffenholz words, peacebuilding is essentially about the process of achieving peace and depending on one's underlying understanding of peace, though peacebuilding differs considerably in terms of approaches, scope of activities and time frame. It is therefore not surprising that the term and concept of peacebuilding is used in research and practice with varying understandings and definitions (Paffenholz, 2009). From the perspective of conflict management theory, peacebuilding is mainly diplomatic and institutionalized approach that brings the violent conflict between conflicting parties to the end while underestimates the deep root causes of conflict and possibility for reemergence of violence ( R. Mac Ginty, 2013). The conflict resolution approach, on the contrary attempt to address the underlying causes of conflicts especially with the involvement of variety of international and local civil society actors while providing long term attempts to rebuild relationship between conflicting actors ( O. Ramsbotham, T. Woodhouse, and H. Miall, 2012). The criticism exposed on the expense of both approaches have underlined the need for complementary approach i.e. implementation of best practices in conflict management and resolution.

From this perspective the role of religious actors in peacebuilding is neglected in conflict management but more present in conflict resolution. The examples are inclusion of international charity and faith organizations in providing assistance or participation of religious actors and leaders in problem solving and mediation. It is John Paul Lederach who developed the first comprehensive and widely discussed transformation-oriented approach (Lederach, 2015) through building of "long-term infrastructure" for peace-building and by supporting the reconciliation potential of society. In line with the Conflict Resolution School, he sees the need to rebuild destroyed relationships, focusing on reconciliation within society and the strengthening of society's peacebuilding potential.

There is an emerging literature analysing peacebuilding through the lens of discourse analysis and advocating for an alternative approach to peacebuilding (Featherstone 2013; Richmond 2011; MacGinty 2011; Heathershaw 2008).

This school shows that the peacebuilding discourse has become a self-referential system that has long lost its connection to the real world and needs of the people. Another argument is peacebuilding becomes an inherently conservative undertaking seeking managerial solutions to fundamental conflicts over resources and power, attempting to modernise and re-legitimise a fundamental status quo respectful of a national and international market economy (Bendaña 2003, 5). The biggest contribution of this emerging Alternative Discourse School of peacebuilding is its focus on ordinary people, oppressed voices, the critical analysis of power structures and an assessment based on realities instead of normative assumptions.<sup>1</sup>

This requires that peacemakers recognize the constitutive role of difference in political settlements. We identify three distinct strategies for inclusion, with corresponding framings of the included. Firstly, inclusion can be used to build a more legitimate peace; secondly, to empower and protect specific actor groups; and thirdly, to transform the sociopolitical structures that underlie conflict.<sup>2</sup>

### **Inclusion**

The connections between religion, conflict and violence are perceived complex and much cross-examined, but those between religion and peacemaking and peacebuilding receive an attention only recently. The scholars of liberal peace theory (as universal ideology for peace, based on an international order of rational, democratic, secular, free-market and human rights-abiding states, together with technical processes and technologies to achieve it) have a tendency to study peace through secular conception and to avoid constructivist or critical approaches.<sup>3</sup> Within the social sciences, with exception of sociology of religion is often sidelined, including disciplines such as international relations and development studies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO) is a global, non-governmental organization that was set up in 1964. We work towards a world in which people can live in dignity and well-being, a world without poverty and injustice. <https://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/interchurch-organisation-development-cooperation-icco>

<sup>2</sup> Hirblinger AT, Landau DM. Daring to differ? Strategies of inclusion in peacemaking. *Security Dialogue*. 2020;51(4):305-322.

<sup>3</sup> Richmond, Oliver P., and Roger Mac Ginty. 2015. Where now for the critique of the liberal peace? *Cooperation and Conflict* 50: 171–89

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Bompani; Religion and development: Tracing the trajectories of an evolving sub-discipline; *Progress in Development Studies*; First Published April 3, 2019

Within peace and conflict studies a strong and coherent body of scholarship around religious engagement in peacebuilding has emerged.<sup>5</sup> Many analyses of this coalesce around Appleby (2000) work on the “ambivalence of the sacred”, which acknowledges that religious actors are important “purveyors of ideas” (Haynes 2011) capable of driving both conflict and peace. Scholars have examined a spectrum of different forms of faith-based action, including in mediation, dialogue and track-II diplomacy (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009; Toft et al. 2011; Johnstone and Svensson 2013), humanitarianism, development and displacement (Ager et al. 2015), and post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and trauma resolution (Putman et al. 2011). Case studies document initiatives within Christianity (Sampson and Lederach 2000; Appleby 2000; Johnston and Sampson 1994), Islam (Abu-Nimer 2003) and non-Western religions (Galtung and MacQueen 2008; Neumaier 2004). A growing body of work also highlights the role of religious women in peacebuilding (Hayward 2015; Hayward and Marshall 2015).

There have been very few substantive analyses of faith-based violent conflict prevention in the academic literature. Notable exceptions include Hertog (2010), who explores the peace-inculcating values and ethics of religion and the potential of these for violence prevention, and Palihapitiya (2018), who considers faith-based early warning systems. A small number of policy-focused reflections exist (Haider 2016; Perchoc 2016). To broaden liberal peace building to include and support faith based actors (FBA); to merge religious with universal values agenda; deeper involvement of FBA into local grass root; religious capital and faith capital.<sup>6</sup>

### **Regional and International policy initiatives**

Several policy processes that are relevant for RETOPEA objectives and findings are also identified but are not limited to following one:

- At the regional level, the European Union (EU) adopted conflict prevention as an explicit objective through the Lisbon Treaty (Vanheusden, 2010)

- The EU and religion interface (through European citizenship and non-discrimination

Approaches; (A Social and employment policy approach; An immigration and home affairs approach; Education and culture approach); The

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<sup>5</sup> Mac Ginty, Roger, and Oliver P. Richmond. 2013. The local turn in peacebuilding: A critical agenda for peace. *Third World Quarterly* 34: 763–83.

<sup>6</sup> Established in 2012, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities brings together international development organizations, UN agencies, universities and religious bodies to consider the potential of local faith communities to improve community health and well-being.

EU Framework on Integration; The Education and culture approach; The Platform for Intercultural Europe;

-EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief – Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU appointed Ján Figel' in May 2016; The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

-UN Women on behalf of the UN's Interagency Task Force for Religion and Development (UNIATF), together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UKAid/DFID and the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

-Gender equality and Religion platform for the gender responsive implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development / CSW 61 (2017, and ongoing)

-Beirut Declaration-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2017) Faith For Right; <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>

-Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning. UNESCO; Eliminating intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16);

-European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2017/religion-and-human-rights-stronger-together>

## Mapping of policy actors and processes

### *Local level actors*

For the purpose of identifying relevant policy actors in different spheres of contact between religious and other actors, the mapping analysis will be focused on local level actors, national and regional and actors relevant for international level of dialogue, communication and policy making that include religious issues.

The faith-based actors range in form, from local faith groups and places of worship, some informally constituted, to international development agencies and global religious movements. In 2019 a new study commissioned by an international coalition of governments and non-governmental organizations examines the importance of having better partnerships between local faith-based actors and international actors and donors as a way of achieving more peaceful and inclusive societies. The local and faith based actors are increasingly recognized as a key one in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes in post conflict societies as it is articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal

16 (SDG16).<sup>7</sup> The main premise in engaging religious actors in peacebuilding is to offer local and grass root responses to local problems as complementary to international interventions.

The role of religious leaders, local religious structures (churches, mosques, synagogues, etc), religious representative organizations and networks, faith-based charitable or development organizations, religious inspired social-political organizations etc. very often could be the only local actors that can provide services and support to vulnerable groups. Although the role of faith based actors in peacebuilding on local level is recognized, there is a need to recognize their possible role in preventing of ethno-political and religious mobilization and violence on local level. One of the important issues in local peacebuilding and the role of religious actors are perceived neutrality or partiality in providing assistance or social intervention. Unfortunately the roles that religious actors play in preventing of outbreaks of political violence are largely unknown. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, the findings and conclusions from WP2 and 3 and 5 are guiding ones for improvement of the cooperation between FBO at local level with local communities or other international actors involved in peacemaking. Even more, their role in early identification of factors that are key for deepening and broadening of local contradictions or escalation of conflicts could be crucial.

### *National level actors*

Religious actors can play a crucial role in processes of influencing public spheres of state, political, and civil society (Jeffrey Haynes; Anja Henning, 2013). In this regard important focus should be paid on religious actors' objectives, means and strategies and effects both in peace and situation of crisis and conflicts. As a general view, Haynes and Henning keeps the stance that various religious actors, whether functioning as interest groups or social movements, and almost irrespective of the religious tradition to which they belong and the culture from which they emanate, do not necessarily differ markedly in terms of strategies. Another important position could be that interrelationships among the state, religious institutions and civil society is essential to understand the significance of believers and beliefs, religious ones in this case, in any given society. The influence of religious institutions in any society is viewed through political divisions, if recognized and through legal aspect that determines prioritization of some or marginalization of other religious actors. Religious actors

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<sup>7</sup> International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) <http://www.partner-religion-development.org>; S.Trotta and O.Wilkinson. (2019) Partnering with Local Faith Actors to Support Peaceful and Inclusive Societies. Washington DC; Bonn: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities; International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)

<sup>8</sup> Laura Payne; What Can Faith-Based Forms of Violent Conflict Prevention Teach Us About Liberal Peace? Religions 2020, 11, 167

on national level are not only associated with formal religious institutions that may be legally recognized by state but also formal and non-formal religious movements, NGOs or other individuals or groups that find religion, culture and identity significant for individual or public life.

### Education and religion

The education system is considered to be a vital element in building peaceful societies through education about social integration, inclusion, and prevention of discrimination on different levels of society. It should address values and competences for resolving differences and conflicts without a culture of violence (Tibbitts, 2020). The countries in Europe, and accession countries, through the European Union, are creating a new policy space in education. (Lawn, 2011). It is based on addressing of shared challenges, setting objectives and international cooperation. It is being formed through law, regulation, networking and harmonization.<sup>9</sup> The EU is also helping to build a European Education Area to strengthen educational outcomes and learning mobility, promote common values and facilitate the mutual recognition of diplomas across national borders. Education and training is a critical facet of the EU's broader socio-economic agenda. Still, in the EU, education and training systems are organised and implemented by the Member States as it is in other cases around the world. While the responsibility for education and training systems lies with individual states, the role of the EU is to support and supplement their capacity. The EU therefore supports Member States through policy cooperation (via the "ET 2020" framework) and its funding instruments. Another important issue is that the responsibility for integration policies lies primarily with the Member States as well as development of cultural policies. The current action plan (**EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)**) proposes concrete actions, gives guidance and delineates funding for initiatives meant to bring inclusion for all. **One of the actions is inclusive education** and training from early childhood to higher education, focusing on easier recognition of qualifications and continued language learning, with support from EU funds.

The contribution of education to the realization of all 16 SDGs determined by UN in 2016 is by no doubt important strategic goal. In the broader sense, education is also a pre-condition for achieving many other Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG 4 *seeks to ensure access to equitable and quality education through all stages of life, as well as to increase the number of young people and adults having relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. The goal also envisages the elimination of gender and income disparities in access to education.* The Chair of the Global Education Monitoring Report Advisory Board, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, emphasized that "education is the most important Sus-

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Lawn; Standardizing the European Education Policy Space First Published January 1, 2011 Research Article <https://doi.org/10.2304/eej.2011.10.2.259>



tainable Development Goal – without education we are not going to achieve any objective: peaceful societies, jobs, ending poverty, solving health problems.” The fulfillment of the education commitments requires not only mobilization of all countries and partners involved in, but also coordinating the tasks of implementing, financing, and monitoring the SDG 4 and its targets. The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee plays a central role as a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism that seeks to integrate the efforts from UN Member States and partners in order to achieve SDG 4 and its targets.

In May 2014, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) for Sustainable Development, partnered with Norwegian umbrella organization of FBOs, Digni, the University College London and George Mason University, to convene bilateral donor representatives and common FBO partners. The purpose was to begin a hitherto new task of collectively assessing partnerships and emerging links **between religion and international development dynamics, keeping in mind the evolving global priorities for the post 2015 era.** The post 2015 priorities were based on the sustainable development goals’ (SDG) agenda, which increasingly emerging through myriad UN and international processes covered a wide spectrum of issues - from governance and institution building to health and nutrition. The SDGs are different from their predecessors so to speak. For the first time, these global development goals refer not only to the ‘poorer’ countries, but they are universal in their relevance and implication.

Nevertheless, there was an emerging consensus around (I) the relevance of the SDGs and (II) that a common language – bridging the development rhetoric and the ‘religious speak’ – may well be timely.

The EU published an overview of the statistical data on SDG 4 ‘Quality education’ in the European Union (EU). It is based on the set of EU SDG indicators for monitoring of progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a EU context.

A representative from the European Union (EU) noted that “FBOs are considered part of the designation of civil society” for the European multilateral mechanism. The EU’s development policy is based on two platforms: democracy and human rights. EU policies, he noted, are therefore rights’ based, and a central feature of the intersections with religion is around the area of freedom of religion and belief. Another important intersection, he noted is around the nexus of religion as part of the considerations around peace and security. The EU commission engages with FBOs through co- financing (i.e. social services delivery projects), “as long as they engage with rights’ based institutions”.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 14.3), provides parents the right to ensure that the education and teaching of their children conforms to their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions. In the majority of EU Member States, children receive religious education in public school, either as a

compulsory or as an optional subject. In most cases, the possibility to withdraw from religious education is subject to the written consent of parents.<sup>10</sup>

EU AFR 2007 aims to help policy makers understand how they can do more for their citizens. We share our insights and raise rights awareness at the EU, national and local level. AFA collect and analyse law and data, provide independent, evidence-based advice on rights, identify trends by collecting and analysing comparable data, help better law making and implementation, support rights-compliant policy responses, strengthen cooperation and ties between fundamental rights actors. The EU AFR serves as a independent agency on providing data, analysis and advice on implementation of fundamental rights in general and equality, non-discrimination and racism including religion and belief.

Non-state education is characterized by a diversity of providers, including religious schools, non-profit schools run by NGOs or foundations, publicly funded schools operated by private boards, community owned schools, and for-profit schools that operate as enterprises. UNESCO considers an educational institution to be “non-state” if it is controlled and managed by an NGO (e.g., religious group, association, or enterprise) or if it has a governing body that primarily consists of members not selected by a public agency (UNESCO 2005). UNESCO—as well as others—groups these various institutions under the term “private education.” Such categorizations may have, unintentionally, contributed to the lack of clarity around the role and impact of non-state engagement in education. In few other areas of activity are NGO activities referred to as “private.” For example, when an NGO or charitable foundation provides water supply to poor communities, this is not referred to as private provision, whereas in the education sector it often is.<sup>11</sup>

### **Faith based organizations and Regional and International policy initiatives**

“The SDGs are a good start”, admitted a representative from Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW). The organization, which has prioritized working with the Post-2015 Dialogue, identified three main issues of focus: gender, finance, and environment. IRW is looking at the engagement with these issues also through the prism of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s own positions, and seeking to support a **Muslim platform for sustainable development**. It is important for FBOs to present frameworks on development and look at how these frameworks change and engage with faith-based leaders.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the FBOs which reflected on their long legacy of work on the issues addressed in the SDG agenda

<sup>10</sup> In most Member States, withdrawing from religious education requires parental consent.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/102215-Non-State-Actors-in-Education-Framing-paper-Final.pdf>

by noting that it has “not been easy” for the organization to feel itself involved in the global conversation, because for too long it “has been a force out in wilderness”. The organization has vast experience bringing together faith, and development concerns around issues of justice, peace, and intelligence. They have always brought peoples’ concerns to the international policy-making tables. Given the people-centred mandate of the WCC, their representatives stressed that each of the seventeen development goals fall within the organization’s mandate. They advocated for the fact that no development work is complete if it does not take into account a clear understanding of the capacities which the Churches represent in service delivery to billions of people, and the capacities of the institutions and the faith communities affiliated to them, to engender social, political and cultural transformation.

Several policy processes that are relevant for RETOPEA objectives and findings are also identified but are not limited to following one”

Faith-based organizations are playing a pivotal role in a number of new fields, including climate change, development and conflict resolution, and the EU and other international organizations including religious NGOs are increasingly taking these organizations into account. (Jonathan Fox, 2006)<sup>12</sup>. The Council beside dialogue with faith and non-faith organizations in addition emphasizes the need for EU’s peace mediation efforts to take into account the effect of climate change on peace and security.<sup>13</sup> It recognizes that climate change is a threat multiplier that exacerbates conflict, endangering peacebuilding, and creating new unforeseen instabilities. The Council stresses that climate-related risks must therefore be consistently considered in conflict-prevention, peace-keeping and peacebuilding strategies. In addition, religion plays an important role in the internal and external policies of EU and its partners on regional and international level.<sup>14</sup>

At the regional level, the EU adopted **conflict prevention (CP) as an explicit objective through the Lisbon Treaty** (Vanheusden 2010). This concept refers to the prevention of violent conflict as fundamental in addressing the security challenges facing Europe and its neighborhood and precondition for political and social advancement. CP is also considered an essential element of effective multilateralism and instrumental tool in achieving the SDGs, specifically Goal 16 which refers to peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Fox; The Multiple Impacts of Religion on International Relations: Perceptions and Reality; In *Politique étrangère* Issue 4, October 2006, pages 1059 to 1071; [https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_PE\\_064\\_1059--the-multiple-impacts-of-religion-on.htm](https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_PE_064_1059--the-multiple-impacts-of-religion-on.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation, 13573/20; 7 December 2020; pp. 4

<sup>14</sup> 2013, the EU published guidelines to mainstream its approach to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and in 2016, Ján Figel was appointed special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/646173/EPRS\\_IDA\(2020\)646173\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/646173/EPRS_IDA(2020)646173_EN.pdf)

for all and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. From RETOPEA perspective SDG4.

European Parliament also supported the decision of the DEG to build on the success of the Jean Monnet Dialogue process with the Macedonian Sorbanie by extending the **Jean Monnet Dialogue's methodology** throughout the countries of the Western Balkans trough building confidence, strengthening democratic culture and enhancing parliamentary capacities. The goals that are achieved on developing a culture of parliamentary dialogue and consensus building and pursue institutional reforms are crucial one for effective and constructive parliamentary dialogue on different priorities including religious dialogue.

Another policy process initiated by European Parliament in 2019 on **building capacity on conflict prevention and mediation (2018/2159(INI))** explicitly focused on role of mediation in CP. Document that initiated CP conception and strategy into EU policy action has dated from 2001 as initiative of Swedish presidency. The core role of prevention of violence was based mainly on crisis management mechanisms (Eva Gross and Ana E. Juncos 2011). Although crisis management and its civilian and military capabilities are still important foreign policy instrument, CP is considered at least as much important policy regarding new risks and threats including radicalization and violent extremism. The evaluation of EU commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding (2018) has identified primary and mix objectives of CP, among others national and local dialogue and reconciliation in peace support operations and countering and preventing violent extremism. As EP and EU now consider mediation as a tool for first response to emerging or ongoing crisis, it is crucial not to neglect the important role of faith and non-faith organizations in support of dialogue, prevention of reemergence of violence, religious education, reconciliation or prevention of radicalization. RETOPEA identifies the historical experiences and success of interfaith dialogue in building trust between communities, the impact of policy dialogue on religious issues on public sphere in several case studies. Therefore, we consider EU Parliament and EU Council<sup>15</sup> and Commission as important stakeholders in policy and decision-making on strategic and regional level in supporting peace initiatives and agreements and inclusion of religious peacemaking.

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<sup>15</sup> Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation 13573/20; <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13573-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

## Conclusion

Religious actors have played a critical role in peacemaking efforts around the world for centuries. Whether it be through mediation, advocacy, or spiritual guidance, religious figures and organizations have been instrumental in facilitating dialogue and reconciliation in various conflict-ridden regions. We have explored the various ways in which religious actors contribute to peacemaking and the significance of their involvement in promoting peace and stability.

One of the key roles that religious actors play in peacemaking is through their moral authority and influence. Religious leaders often have the trust and respect of their followers, and their teachings on forgiveness, reconciliation, and nonviolence can inspire individuals to work towards peace.

Furthermore, religious actors often have extensive networks and connections that can be leveraged to facilitate dialogue and communication between conflicting parties. Whether it be through interfaith dialogue initiatives, peacebuilding workshops, or mediation efforts, religious organizations can provide a neutral space for dialogue and collaboration. This can help build trust between communities and pave the way for sustainable peace agreements.

In addition, religious actors can also advocate for policy changes and promote peacebuilding initiatives at various levels of government and society. By leveraging their moral authority and influence, religious organizations can advocate for policies that promote peace, human rights, and social justice. For example, religious leaders have been instrumental in advocating for religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity in post-conflict societies.

Moreover, religious actors can provide crucial spiritual and emotional support to individuals and communities affected by conflict. Through prayers, counseling, and spiritual guidance, religious figures can help individuals cope with trauma, grief, and loss, and promote healing and reconciliation. This can be particularly important in post-conflict societies where communities are grappling with the legacy of violence and division.

Furthermore, religious actors can also play a role in preventing conflict and fostering interfaith harmony. By promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation between different religious communities, religious organizations can help address the underlying causes of conflict and promote respect for diversity and pluralism. This can help build a culture of peace and tolerance that transcends religious, ethnic, and cultural divides.

In conclusion, religious actors play a crucial role in peacemaking efforts around the world. Through their moral authority, influence, and connections, religious figures and organizations can facilitate dialogue, advocate for peace, provide spiritual support, and promote interfaith harmony in conflict-ridden regions. Their involvement is essential in promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation and fostering a culture of peace in societies affected by violence and conflict. As such, it is important to recognize and support the contributions

of religious actors in peacemaking initiatives and to collaborate with them in building a more peaceful and just world.

The cooperation between religious actors and civil society, particularly in engaging with youth, is a critical component in addressing social issues and promoting meaningful change in communities. Religious actors can play a significant role in shaping youth attitudes and behaviors, as they often hold positions of influence and authority within their communities. By collaborating with civil society organizations, religious actors can leverage their networks and resources to create impactful initiatives that resonate with young people and address their needs.

One way in which religious actors can cooperate with civil society and youth is through the implementation of programs that promote social justice and equality. By working together, these groups can organize events and campaigns that raise awareness about important issues such as poverty, discrimination, and environmental sustainability. Through these collaborative efforts, youth are empowered to take action and make a positive impact in their communities, bridging the gap between religious teachings and social activism.

Furthermore, the cooperation between religious actors and civil society can also lead to the development of educational programs that promote tolerance and understanding among diverse groups. By engaging with youth in dialogue and activities that foster respect for different cultures and beliefs, religious actors and civil society organizations can help to combat prejudice and promote inclusivity within communities. These initiatives not only benefit youth in terms of personal growth and development, but also contribute to creating a more cohesive and harmonious society.

In conclusion, the cooperation between religious actors, civil society, and youth is essential in addressing the complex social challenges facing communities today. By working together, these groups can leverage their unique strengths and perspectives to create meaningful change and empower young people to become agents of positive transformation. It is through these collaborative efforts that we can build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society for future generations.

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**UN**

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