

**Religion and Society in times of Covid-19**  
***International Workshop of Justice and Peace Europe 2020***

1. *The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commission (Justice and Peace Europe) held its annual International Workshop on 10 and 11 October in an online format. Fifty participants from over twenty different countries and commissions were involved. The theme of the International Workshop this year was “Religion and Society in times of Covid-19”.*
2. A first webinar of the International Workshop dealt with *“Perspectives for the Conference on the Future of Europe in times of Covid-19”*. The Conference on the Future of Europe was to start already in May. Because of the pandemic and a lack of agreement, still to be resolved, between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, its timing, agenda and organisational details still remain unclear. A particular challenge for the Conference on the Future of Europe will be the need to also rethink the relations with countries, that do not or do no longer belong to European Union and other transnational European organisations like the OSCE and the Council of Europe, where Justice and Peace Europe holds a participatory status. Especially the link with the Council of Europe is particularly important for the respect for human dignity and human rights.
3. Herman van Rompuy, former President of the European Council, who was among the speakers of the panel said that the Conference on the Future of Europe was necessary because of the human impact and catastrophe caused by the pandemic and also because the world at large has undergone profound and massive change in recent years. However, he pledged to “keep the Conference away from a debate about institutional innovations - except in foreign policy and on competences ; institutional issues, he opined, threaten to absorb all the political energy and divert us from the debate on the Union's substantive policy priorities, namely climate change, our 'strategic autonomy', migration, security in all its aspects, health, inequalities and solidarity in all areas - including climate, migration, convergence, reconversion - the rule of law.
4. Paulo Rangel, Member of the European Parliament for the European People’s Party and another panelist, said in his statement that the functioning and the powers of the European Union needed to be revisited, especially with regard to health and infectious diseases. The Conference on the Future of Europe would consist of two phases, a first part consisting of citizens’ assemblies and a second more institutionalised phase. He was of the opinion that many improvements could already be obtained in the framework of the existing Treaties, which were amended with the Treaty of Lisbon (2009).

5. In his contribution the third panelist Damian Boeselager, MEP, Member of the Greens and cofounder of the transnational party Volt Europe, underlined the weakening of the parliamentary democracies and of traditional political parties. He therefore strongly supported the idea of citizens' assemblies at the European level whose participants will be randomly selected. Such assemblies could be one instrument among others to counter the prevailing sentiments of fear and anxiety.
6. The second webinar of the International Workshop turned to current "Challenges to dialogue in religion and society". Alexander Filipovic of the Munich School for Philosophy presented seven theses on the state of democratic dialogue in digital times. He underlined the incredible amount of public communication thanks to social networks but also the increase of negative aspects like hate-speech and fake news. He also stressed the important role of public broadcasting. The public sphere in democracies obviously is in need of new forms of regulation and especially at the European level. The ultimate goal should be a renewed connection between public debate and political decision making.
7. Youssef Kamal El Hage from the Notre Dame University in Lebanon discussed in his contribution ways forward for Christian-Muslim dialogue in the shadow of the pandemic. He particularly stressed the importance of Pope Francis' recent encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, which "stems from the fact that it is closely connected to the historical *Document on Human Fraternity*, signed in Abu Dhabi on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019 by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb". He added that *Fratelli Tutti* has been highly acclaimed by Muslim authorities, a first in the history of papal encyclicals."
8. The final webinar of the International Workshop took place on Sunday 11 October with the 2020 Justice and Peace Europe lecture, which was delivered this year by Flaminia Giovanelli, the former under-secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. She drew on her experience of more than four decades of service for the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to underline the inseparable connection between justice and peace. The COVID-19 pandemic had shown that health, especially with regard to infectious diseases, is a global common good. Not taking it into account accordingly not only leads to many injustices but also puts a threat to peace.
9. At their general assembly on Monday 12 October in the light of the discussions of the International Workshop, the delegates of Justice and Peace Europe chose as the theme for the Justice and Peace Europe **Common Concerted Action 2021** : "***The Future of Europe and the European Union – a call for dialogue as a key to just transition***".