



# The role of public administration in interreligious dialogue. International standards and recommendations

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**Abstract.** *Interreligious dialogue, recognized as a democratic instrument with the potential to foster respect and cooperation, occupies a pivotal role within the general democratic framework. Despite its significance, international organizations have not prescribed a specific framework for conducting interreligious dialogue. Instead, a diverse range of options exists, from ad-hoc to institutionalized formats, involving various stakeholders from religious leaders to local communities. This review study addresses the evolution and conceptual foundations of interreligious dialogue, while also exploring its integration into the democratization process. The first section of the study defines key terms within an interreligious dialogue framework using a conceptual framework from the social and political sciences. The avoidance of “conceptual stretching”, as articulated by Giovanni Sartori, is emphasized to elucidate commonalities between religious freedom (Freedom of Religion or Belief – FoRB) and interreligious dialogue, highlighting the crucial role of FoRB in governing interreligious discourse. The subsequent sections of the study delve into the multifaceted nature of interreligious dialogue, examining its formats, benefits, and the role of the State in promoting it. The study identifies diverse formats, from theological exchanges to non-hierarchical cooperation, emphasizing the importance of common goals and avoiding the imposition of individual perspectives and politicisation. In conclusion, this study systematizes the core elements of interreligious dialogue and underscores the importance of inclusivity, de-politicisation, neutrality, and dialogue over debate, ultimately contributing to a contemporary democratic model for interreligious dialogue that upholds the values of freedom and cooperation within diverse societies.*

**Keywords:** *De-politicisation, Freedom of Religion, International Organizations, Democratization, Dialogue.*

**JEL:** D72, F53.

## 1. Introduction

The partnership and dialogue between different religious and cultural traditions are recognized as being a democratic instrument that can contribute to an increase in confidence, respect, and cooperation, and is part of the “human dimensions” commitments within the technico-diplomatic language of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (ODIHR, 2011). Nevertheless, neither the OSCE nor other international organizations offer a rule on how interreligious dialogue should be carried out, with options being among the most varied, from ad-hoc to institutionalized formats, from a dialog between religious leaders to that carried out at the local community level.

The oldest attempts to articulate interreligious dialogue date back to the year 1893, with the establishment of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (Moyaert, 2013). What subsequently became known as the “ecumenical movement” (...), with its different sequences, developed within a theological and even political framework, and diverted the meaning of interreligious dialogue. It was recovered more recently through international organizations and as examples of best practices in different countries in the context of advancing democratization.

In the first part of this study, I will define the basic terms of an interreligious dialogue using a conceptual framework from the social and political sciences, and avoiding the dangers defined by Giovanni Sartori (1970) as “conceptual stretching.” Thus, the tendency to broadly define various concepts, such as discrimination, interreligious dialogue, and many others, gives rise to a premise that no longer represents strong concepts, with universally accepted understandings and meanings, to become weak metaphors. In the second section, I will lay out several common points relating to religious freedom (Freedom of Religion or Belief – *ForB*<sup>(1)</sup>) and interreligious and interconfessional dialogue, while in the last section, I will draw a model for interreligious dialogue based on principles of religious freedom and depoliticization, as well as several recommendations for participants in an interreligious dialogue.

In methodological terms, this study sets out from the hypothesis that the rights and freedoms of citizens of any democratic regime take precedence over tradition, organic or organized solidarity, and even, in most cases, over security threats. As such, Freedom of Religion or Belief (*ForB*), referred to in international documents as *expressis verbis* must govern the interreligious framework. Freedom of Religion

and Belief is mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 18) as follows: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance” (United Nations, 1948). Furthermore, the quasi-canonical definition, established as far back as 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was also adopted in the Helsinki Final Act (1975), as well as by successive OSCE meetings<sup>(2)</sup>.

In its internal realm (*forum internum*), FoRB protects individuals to have, adopt, choose, change, or renounce a theist, agnostic or atheist faith. In its external realm (*forum externum*), FoRB protects persons either individually or in a community, to manifest their religion or belief in the practice of their faith, the religious teachings, and the respecting and observance of religious traditions (Ferrari, 2020; Kerr, 2022).

Limitations of FoRB are acceptable only insofar as these are applied as to any other fundamental right, specifically in very strict keeping with a variety of conditions and only in situations of imminent danger to public safety, public order, public health, morality, or other fundamental rights. No one but the State must justify the application of restrictions in a non-arbitrary fashion, demonstrate that restrictions are prescribed by law, are non-discriminatory (do not affect certain people/communities more than others), are proportional to the danger (as unintrusive as possible), and, respectively necessary to attain the desired purpose (Raiu & Mina-Raiu, 2022). For instance, the limitation of FoRB may be considered discriminatory if it does not have objective and reasonable justification or if it is disproportionate to the desired purpose, as was observed in several countries during the pandemic (Zidaru, 2020). Unlike other human rights, such as freedom of expression, FoRB may not be limited based on public safety (van der Vyver, 2005; Martinez-Torron, 2021).

## 2. Definitions and concepts

Although numerous commitments by OSCE underline the importance of dialogue to create a cohesive, safe, and peaceful society, the question *What form should this dialogue take?* cannot be answered either simply or uniformly, because before responding to this head-on, other questions, such as the one that follows, must be

answered first: *How far must governments go to intervene in interreligious dialogue?*

International commitment to interreligious dialogue is a process that may not be isolated from the nature of political regimes and was accelerated in the past two decades based on the rapprochement of Eastern Europe to the cultural and human rights practices developed in the West<sup>(3)</sup>, including activities such as:

- Religious leaders respond with a common voice in specific matters on the public agenda, as in the case of COVID-19 pandemic in some countries (Williams, Miller & Nussbaum, 2021);
- Structures/institutions are created as platforms for dialogue for the various segments of society (youth, the elderly, etc.);
- Local-level activism, in which participants jointly promote religious differences and social changes;
- Dialogue based on Sacred Scripture.

These types of activities are characterized by:

- Knowing “others” (i.e. to facilitate meetings among people of different faiths);
- Responses intended to explain/debunk myths and preconceptions about different religions;
- Informal instruction about different religious or faith communities;
- Mediation of secular conflicts using religious or theological tools (invoking religion as an instrument for peace);
- Activities to promote human rights, peace, community cohesion, or even public health campaigns<sup>(4)</sup>.

Most of the time, the interreligious dialogue does not follow a canonical model applicable in any context but is rather contextually circumscribed - especially culturally and politically (Cornille, 2013), and the terms used are not interchangeable based on the particular language (Swidler, 1983). Concepts are not uniformly based on history, socio-cultural context, or theological language. Therefore, the choice of language must be fully analyzed to be all-inclusive. Generally, the use of primarily theological terminology is more efficient than a vocabulary specific to human rights, because it recognizes more religious traditions, local context, etc.

## 2.1. The role of the State in the promotion of dialog and interreligious partnership

The role of the State is not set canonically in international documents, but rather only approximately, leaving the decision and scope of involvement to the national policy level, based on the principle of subsidiarity. However, in the past two-three decades, international commitments in matters of human rights and FoRB reserve the responsibility of handling interreligious dialogue for the State. This was done at the 20th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, held in Kyiv in 2013 by Decision 3/13 (OSCE, 2013), by which OSCE participating States were invited to:

- Promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialog and partnerships.
- Aim to prevent intolerance, violence, and discrimination based on religion or belief, including against Christians, Jews, Muslims, and members of other religions.
- Encourage the inclusion of religious and belief communities, in a timely fashion, in public discussions on pertinent legislative initiatives.
- Promote dialogue between religious or belief communities and governmental bodies, including, where necessary, on issues related to the use of places of worship and religious properties.

The current practice has resulted in several models of (non-)involvement of the State in interreligious dialogue:

- The State stays uninvolved, a passive player, so as not to influence the interreligious dialogue agenda, but there is a very active civil society segment (for NGOs, think tanks, etc.) that promotes interreligious dialogue.
- The State does not get involved directly, but rather participates as an observer at various levels (local, regional, national).
- The State creates a platform for dialogue, offering subsidies, and serving as a facilitator of dialogue, but not as a participating player.

The State may offer financial support for interreligious dialogue in the following ways:

- Grants offered to civil society organizations for the design and organization of interreligious dialogue initiatives.
- For research and communication activities.
- Increasing administrative capacity in the case of religious organizations that wish to be involved in types of interreligious dialogue.

- The financial support must be known to be available continuously and to all initiatives, both across the leadership level of organizations and at the local initiative level.
- Support for networking events that bring together various religious communities.
- Intensification of religious literacy.
- Financial support should be available and transparent, with simple administrative procedures, and take into account the impact and sustainability of the initiative.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for intensifying interreligious dialogue, especially between the state and faith communities, OSCE issued the Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The document was principally intended to identify consensual, national-level solutions to guarantee FoRB as widely as possible while allowing states to act to limit the effects of the pandemic. Therefore, the document included a series of recommendations, some of which were specifically related to an increase in an interreligious dialogue: the states must ensure that religious limitations are accompanied by guides addressed specifically to the authorities that implement the restrictions (such as the police, the gendarmerie, etc.), and to those affected by such restrictions (citizens of all faiths); the states must ensure that newer religious organizations (not only those holding a form of recognized status) or ones with fewer members are treated equally with the traditional faiths, and benefit from equal protection; establish permanent channels of communication, including at the regional and local levels (ODIHR, 2020).

The state may promote dialogue initiatives as a religiously neutral facilitator, including all legitimate players, respecting the general framework of FoRB, being impartial, offering equal treatment to all involved and avoiding ad-hoc initiatives to the detriment of systemic ones. In this hypothesis involving the state, there are a few dangers that must be prevented:

- States will be tempted to politically direct the interreligious dialogue agenda and even the internal agenda of religious organizations (Maier & Schafer, 2004).
- The influence of the state increases if it attempts to define the dialogue agenda.
- The State may elect leaders to collaborate with from among persons who claim to represent the community, who do not truly have the necessary legitimacy; will coopt those that it wants to listen to, not necessarily those it must listen to.

- The dialogue can be derailed into an instrument of supervision and control, especially in the case of states that have not separated themselves firmly from their totalitarian past (fascist, communist, etc.).
- Depoliticization.

## 2.2. What formats and benefits can interreligious dialogue have?

There can be very diverse formats, from theological exchanges between religious leaders to non-hierarchical cooperation, bottom to top, on subjects of common interest. Some activities can have an official structure, while others can be informal. The benefits of interreligious dialogue depend on the level of involvement and commitment of the participants. As with any form of dialogue, the benefits appear when the participants have a common goal and do not attempt to derail the dialogue to impose all of their points of view. The first measurable benefit is an increased potential for reciprocal understanding, reduced prejudices and stereotyping, a rise in social cohesion and social peace, or even military/political, if we think of the different international contexts, such as the contemporary war in Ukraine<sup>(5)</sup>. In conflict or post-conflict areas, the dialogue can contribute substantially to reconciliation (Hayward, 2012; Sampson, 2007). Other benefits include the promotion of the common good, overcoming stereotypes, stigmatization, and prejudice, battling religious illiteracy (Moore, 2014), and the promotion of security by way of united responses to such phenomena as hate crime & speech, offensive speech, and attacks on some religious officials or houses of worship. A dialogue can also serve as a preventive measure in situations that could escalate without such communication.

### **Who participates in dialog?**

It is necessary to accept the fact that interreligious dialogue cannot include all players. The inclusion of some players can lead to others being left out. It must also be accepted that not all organizations want to be involved, and it is important to consider the internal structure of religious organizations because although all voices are legitimate, not all are equal. The dialogue must not exclude young people, women, atheists, agnostics, recognized organizations, or those not recognized by the state, academics, policymakers, and experts in human rights and FoRB.

### **Dialogue is not a debate**

Dialogue involves a form of discussion by which various positions are explored in a spirit of reciprocal respect, to identify a positive outcome for participants



(KACIID, 2017). A dialogue begins with several hypotheses: its purpose is to find a common goal, an open attitude, and a willingness to listen to others and avoid preconceptions and presumptive conclusions. On the other hand, debate can degenerate into a means for convincing others of one's point of view, and even highlighting the weaknesses of others. Debate assumes that there is a single correct answer or only one truth, and winning the debate is the purpose in itself while listening to others happens only to develop a counter-argument (KACIID, 2017).

If dialogue digresses into a debate, it can cause division. For this reason, an interreligious dialogue begins with a set of “game” rules (Swidler, 1983), such as it is highly unlikely that a single person, even an extremely representative one of his community, can offer the position of the entire community; in many cases, it is very possible that the religious organization itself does not have a cohesive point of view; participants must be enabled to express only those positions with which they feel comfortable, to set out with definitions and concepts whose understandings are as common as possible.

The Council of Europe (n.d.) proposes 12 principles for interreligious dialogue that begin with the need to understand and the incarnation of dialogue in different forms of partnership. Therefore, an interreligious dialogue should not be seen as a party congress at the end of which decisions are ratified and produce legal consequences, but rather as a form of integration and knowledge. For this reason, also, the chairing of the dialog is carried out through rotation by all members, a practice likewise adopted at the time of its establishment in 2011/2013 by the Consultative Council of Religious Faiths in Romania<sup>(6)</sup> or the Interreligious Council of Albania, created in 2007<sup>(7)</sup>. However, if the state is included in this format, it is preferable that the chairing of meetings not be assigned to State representatives to avoid the risk of politicizing the dialogue. The dialogue does not promote either a particular religion or theological truth, but needs to be directed towards the common good, neutral in terms of religious membership; it is not a platform for proselytizing or a platform to promote syncretism or religious relativism nor one to erase religious identity.

### 3. How can interreligious dialogue be put into practice?

In order not to be politically instrumentalized, the interreligious dialog must start from an analysis of the context by way of evaluating all of the country's stakeholders: religious organizations, parliamentary groups or commissions,



government institutions, civil society institutions, the media, and influential public voices in this domain. Have there been similar experiences in the past? What results did these have?

According to the European Union Council (Ventura, 2020), EU Member States commit to “make use of all available tools, including the financial instruments, to promote a culture of mutual respect, diversity, tolerance, dialog, and peace” (Art. 34c). Furthermore, “the EU will also engage in the fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, and the implementation of the relevant UN resolutions in that field, as well as in initiatives in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialog in the spirit of openness, engagement, and mutual understanding [...] Religious tolerance as well as inter-cultural and interreligious dialog must be promoted in a human rights perspective, ensuring respect of freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and other human rights and fundamental freedoms.” (Art. 60-61).

A series of meanings are falsely attributed to FoRB, including the fact that religious freedom protects religions, not people, that it promotes a different agenda or is even contrary to human rights, and that it promotes a sort of western cultural imperialism (Bielefeldt, Ghanea-Hercock & Wiener, 2016). For this reason, the dialog requires the presence of an experienced facilitator who knows how to manage such prejudices and stereotypes, and who does not allow the dialogue to be derailed from its intended purpose.

Religious freedom must not be the only theme on the dialogue agenda, but it should not be missing as the central point of reference in dialogue, together with other “axioms” of religious freedom which can either not be placed on the dialogue agenda because they are by definition contrary to human rights (points a and b), or because they are subjects that are so present in society that they cannot be overlooked (points c-e):

#### **a. Legislation concerning apostasy and/or blasphemy**

In some countries, blasphemy is considered a punishable felony (Sturges, 2015). Blasphemy can be defined as the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God (Petersen). When legislation exists that prevents blasphemy, religious sentiment, ideologies, and ideas are prioritized over the individual right to express himself freely. Anti-blasphemy legislation tends to favor a certain religious faith over another (Berkmann, 2018). Thus, laws are discriminatory by their very

nature, and their abolishing is a necessity in keeping with international standards for religious freedom: “At the national level, blasphemy laws are counterproductive, since they may result in de facto censure of all inter-religious or belief and intra-religious dialog...” (OHCHR, 2012).

### **b. Proselytism**

In democratic logic, proselytism is an approach to presenting to others one's religious faith, and it is an integral part of religious freedom until someone uses his authority to impose on or seduce another person with his religious point of view (Menchik, 2018). Moreover, proselytism is discomforting for those religious communities who fear that on a free market for the promotion of religious ideas, they might lose members. However, for some religious communities, sharing faith is not just a desire but also an obligation. Christianity itself was spread through different forms of proselytism (Fletcher, 2014). For this reason, the right to present and promote one's religious faith, including in public spaces, is protected by international standards of human rights, and the state must ensure that no single religion/faith is favored in terms of a right to express in this manner.

### **c. Religious symbols**

Religious symbols in public spaces will always be a subject for interreligious dialog because it has to do directly with the relationship between church and state, governed by the need for the religious neutrality of the state, but also the principle of religious freedom, which allows religious organizations to express themselves in public spaces (Schmitt, 2008; Barnett, 2013). The presence of religious elements in public spaces can also be interpreted as a means for reducing religious illiteracy or a form of informal religious education, which in turn is a right derived from or associated with religious freedom. This includes the right of every person to receive religious education in his mother tongue, individually or in the community, in spaces suited to such purposes (school, house of worship, etc.) including the freedom of parents to educate their children based on their religious convictions.

### **d. Religion in the workplace**

The issue of religion in the workplace is a subject that is being increasingly debated due to the rise in religious and ethnic diversity, especially in larger places of employment, such as multinational companies. People may wear different clothing, and need to take off alternative days according to the religious calendar that they observe. This is true also in Romania, where the National Council for Combatting

Discrimination (CNCD) has analyzed many complaints in the past few years<sup>(8)</sup> and the agenda of this institution appears to be increasingly committed to issues relating to religious freedom. People must be allowed to practice and to observe their religious faith, even in the context of their work contract, and both the State and the private environment must make efforts to combat discrimination.

#### **e. Combating incitement to hate and violence**

In the global context in which there is increasing talk about the securitization of religion (Štimac & Aslanova, 2021; Bialasiewicz & Gentile, 2019), States must make efforts to prevent incitement to religious hatred, not only through declarations by public officials or religious leaders but especially through public policies. Religiously motivated violence can take on various forms, such as online and offline hate speech, attacks on houses of worship, physical attacks on religious officials or devotees, attacks on properties belonging to religious communities, or the more recent phenomenon of religious bullying (Ryan & Gardner, 2021). Such a subject must be permanently on the interreligious dialogue agenda, even if there do not seem to be obvious dangers and tensions, so that dialogue can contribute to social peace.

The recent case between a Finnish parliamentarian and a bishop, who risked spending time in prison to express religious opinions in a public space, is relevant in this sense. Material evidence exists in the form of a 2004 pamphlet, a 2019 radio show, and a tweet in which the parliamentarian offered criticism in the form of a theological argument about the gesture of the Lutheran Church to offer support during a public event dedicated to LGBT persons. The Prosecutor's indictment stipulates that the Bible contains offensive words aimed at ethnic and sexual minorities. The Parliamentarian in question formulated a point of view in which he makes an observation that the Finnish State allows you to agree with the Bible only as part of your conscience (*forum internum*) and that personal adherence to the Christian religion may not form the basis of public expression (*forum externum*).

The Finnish episode is a test for interreligious dialogue and freedom of religion, albeit fundamentally hampered and perverted in many countries of the world due to the pandemic, and generally in a heightened regression globally. It is an episode that raises many questions regarding the intersection between LGBT rights and freedom of expression on the one hand, and religious freedom on the other.

In constitutional terms, religious freedom is not accorded specifically to religion, but rather to persons and groups of persons. As such, it is not applied to Christianity, but rather to Christians. It is thus a form of civic protection, deeply connected to other civil rights and freedoms as supplementary rights, such as those recognized as far back as the first Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America in 1791 (Levy, 2017), as well as by international treaties and declarations that we should today consider binding in the process of advancing democracy.

Another principle that springs from international standards for religious freedom is that rights are not competitive. In other words, LGBT rights can coexist with religious freedom, without the risk of canceling each other out (Ghanea, 2010; Bielefeldt, Ghanea-Hercock & Wiener, 2016). Furthermore, public perception is indeed such that we are in the midst of a zero-all game: any progress in the area of LGBT rights appears to be a defeat for religious freedom and vice versa (Hosu, 2015). Can it, therefore, be said that sex education in schools affects religious and moral values or that religious education in schools discourages the free expression of young people about sexual rights? These questions can be answered in many ways, but not so many as to discourage us from debating and further refining the relationship between religion and society in the democratic context.

When human rights are being increasingly judicialized and subjected to legal recourse, a danger appears that religious freedom will be pushed into the courts, avoiding not only traditional forms of public debate and interreligious dialogue, but also public policies that can accommodate different opinions and options. In other words, we rush to pass decisive matters into law without considering the impact and consequences in all social spheres. This judicialization of rights and freedoms is nothing more than a sub-section of political judicialization to which the French political scientist Pierre Rosanvallon (2014) drew attention two decades ago.

It is for this reason, that at the national level, through institutions such as the equality bodies or in other government sectors, and at the international and European levels through the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE), the United Nations, or the Agency for Fundamental Rights of the European Union, States also take on the role of educator in the complex approach of fitting various human rights into democratic frameworks through public policies. They do this in the form of an intermediary laboratory between free citizen experiences and the despotic dimension of the state and manage to produce benchmarks of tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of us all, as free persons.

Moreover, in the international environment, these benchmarks of behavior and public policies result in various non-binding texts and orientation documents with no punitive powers. This is the case of the UN, which gathered the expertise of numerous stakeholders in the area of religious freedom and produced The Rabat Plan of Action (OHCHR, 2012), a document already used by many countries, but also by the European Court of Human Rights. In an effort not to treat perfunctory situations such as that mentioned above in Finland but rather in a formal and consensual framework, The Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence begins from the legal framework of art. 20 (2) of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights – ICCPR (UN, 1966) and defines hatred or hostility as intense and irrational emotions of contempt, enmity, and loathing against a target group.

Furthermore, encouragement or incitement must be aggressively connotated to be placed under the specter of hatred. Article 20 (2) of the ICCPR – “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law” – sets a very high bar specifically to limit/censure, even though criminal sanctions, so that freedom of expression remains an exception.

Concretely, speech may be categorized as incitement to hatred only after it passes the six-part threshold test of the Rabat Plan of Action:

- (1) Analysis of the context in which the speech was made.
- (2) The speaker’s position or status, specifically the speaker’s standing in the context of the audience to whom the speech is directed.
- (3) The clear intent of the speaker to encourage or incite action if negligence or recklessness is not sufficient circumstances to classify a speech as incitement to hatred.
- (4) Content and form of the speech must be considered from a critical perspective.
- (5) Extent of the speech act in terms of magnitude and size of the audience.
- (6) Reasonable likelihood, including imminence, to identify the degree of risk of the actions that can be generated by the respective speech.

Further to the Rabat Plan of Action, the interreligious dialogue platform #Faith4Rights (2020) was initiated, which is made up of 18 commitments of UN Member States, drawn up by expert consensus to administer the fine line between

freedom of practicing a religious faith and consequences of discrimination that can arise here (Wiener, 2020).

Beyond international documents and guides, which are quite difficult to navigate, there is still the head-on question: can someone receive a punishment that deprives her/him of freedom for expressing religious faith in the public space? Without analyzing the actual details of the Finnish case, which ended with a decision in favor of both the archbishop and the parliamentarian<sup>(9)</sup>, it seems that we are faced with democratic regress. This is encouraged by dogmatic secularism which gnaws at the idea of religious pluralism and diversity and inhibits interreligious dialogue, a hypothesis that States are asked to condemn in point 4 of #Faith4Rights to remain in the religious neutrality zone and not to become anti-religion promoters.

Thus, the characteristics, implications, and conditions of interreligious dialog can be summed up as follows:

**Figure 1.** *Interreligious Dialog*

Is...	Is not...
Brings both major and minor religious communities together	Always theologized
A way to strengthen social cohesion	Convincing other participants to change their Faith
Exchange of information, ideas, and experiences	About syncretism
Supports an inclusive approach, and makes available a platform to learn about others	Attacks on different religious identities to compromise them
Sustainable	Negotiation
Includes different players and faiths to be non-discriminatory	Pleading for a certain religious Faith
Adapted to the context	Reserved only for the representatives of majority religions
Cooperative	Exclusivity
Broaches difficult, sensitive subjects	Avoiding difficult, sensitive subjects
Respects differences	Ignoring differences

**Source:** author's personal processing

#### 4. Depolitization of Church-State Dialog

In Romania, the theme of collaboration between the different religious faiths is still overdue, both in terms of academic research and at the practical level. The first reason is a lack of government initiative, regardless of the political party component thereof, to breathe life into such projects. Beginning with the hypothesis consecrated in conceptualization and international practice of human rights, States are the ones who are responsible for the entire range of human rights, including religious freedom. In this context, interreligious dialogue and the partnership

between Church and State can contribute to the promotion of religious freedom, but does not eliminate the responsibility of the State as “duty-bearer” (Vandenhoe, 2015). The State and Church are unequal partners in the structure of dialogue: the State must facilitate, while the Church is free to participate or set the agenda.

A sign of a healthy democracy in the area of religious life is depoliticization, while the proof of this sign is the capacity of religious organizations to speak freely before the State and in public spaces. A State that does not share the vision of certain religious organizations (for instance, the fact that religious organizations did not wish to promote vaccinations during the COVID Pandemic), must ensure that the voices of religious organizations are uncensored and fully heard, especially in the context in which the State offers financing to religious faiths based on unpredictable criteria, and therefore has direct instruments to intervene in their lives. The State must respect the autonomy of religious communities, and may invite them to the dialogue, but may not impose it. Furthermore, it may not make access to public funds conditional on participation in the dialogue.

If a dialogue is not depoliticized by its very format, it can be derailed for electoral purposes or financing conditions. Thus, in order to avoid this situation, it is necessary to coopt all legitimately interested parties (academia, parliamentary oppositions, press, etc.), and instead, the participation of the State must be carried out through a different institution than the one that normally provides financing or administers the return of church properties confiscated by the communist regime.

Also, the depoliticization of interreligious dialog is ensured by the advancement of a culture of religious freedom among political decision-makers and public administration (Figel, 2017). Democracy is based on the bureaucratic rule of law-oriented towards a maximizing of citizen rights and freedoms, which is why dialog must be based on international and national legislation and best practices in countries with democratic traditions.

In the Romanian case, the State has proven to be a modest facilitator/mediator of interreligious dialogue, not only in historical terms but also throughout the pandemic years. Romania was a victim of somewhat neo-communist political policies in terms of interreligious dialogue: the State invited faiths to dialogue more often when it required their legitimization - the use of the Orthodox Church in the 1990s for the acceptance of the Iliescu regime, the invitation extended to faiths to sign the Snagov Declaration (1995), and the attempt to instrumentalize the image



of religious faiths to promote the anti-COVID vaccine in 2021 - (Dascalu et al., 2021). Paradoxically, in the Romanian case, neither the State nor the minority (in terms of numbers of members) religious faiths initiated platforms of interreligious dialogue, but rather the Romanian Orthodox Church, through its Patriarch Daniel, initiated the Consultative Council of Faiths in 2011/2013, an interreligious dialogue platform, which operates without the support of the State.

## 5. Best Practices and Recommendations

Even though the Romanian State has not been concerned with the development of public policies for promoting religious freedom or interreligious dialog, there are several examples of interreligious dialog, including the establishment of the Centre for Pontifical and Ancient Christian Literature Studies in 2011, initiated by Robert Dodaro, O.S.A., Dean of the Augustinianum of the Vatican's San Giovanni Pontifical Lateran University, and by Claudiu Tuțu, a Greco-Catholic priest with the Gherla-Cluj Diocese. The founding of this center, whose main objective is pontifical research, and which was the result of intensive interreligious dialog concerning the works of Eastern Fathers, brings together around the same table several Christian confessions: Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Reformed, and Roman Catholic, and is operating within the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj<sup>(10)</sup>.

Another example of interreligious dialogue took place during the 2022 Population and Housing Census (March-July 2022), an initiative of the National Institute for Statistics, which is central public administration body. In this example, the State initiator proposed that the census put on the table of decision-makers the most faithful picture of faiths collected through the question relating to religious adherence of the resident population. The dialogue was carried out online, both due to pandemic restrictions, but also because not all diocesan and regional representatives of Romanian religious faiths could have met easily in person. The subject discussed, namely, the promotion of the Population and Housing Census among the faithful was decided by the National Institute for Statistics, within the boundaries of administrative competence limits set by European and national legislation, and meetings took place monthly<sup>(11)</sup>. The results of this dialogue were measurable because a significant portion of the Romanian population, including those encouraged by religious faiths, participated in the automated census (47%), much higher than the initial 35% expected. Within the framework of this dialogue,

which targeted subjects such as the usefulness of declaring religious adherence in the census, the pastoral-missionary usefulness of the local, regional, national, and European, etc. adherence picture, but also subjects that might seem detailed, such as the obligation of field census-takers not to ostensibly wear sacerdotal insignia specific to the communities or carry out the census on specific religious days (Friday for Muslims, Saturday for Jews and Adventists, and Sunday for Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, etc.).

In conclusion, the interreligious dialogue must include religious leaders (both ordained and non-ordained persons) of all religious organizations, regardless of their status, academics, civil society organizations, public authorities, and international organizations. The purpose of the dialogue is the understanding of religious cultures and faiths of others, the consciousness-raising of ethnic and religious diversity, the prevention of abusive compartmentalizing, increased religious and cultural literacy, and the development of public policies. This cannot be used for purposes aimed at endangering a certain religious group, creating a new faith, or degenerating into a theological debate.

It is not the role of the State to establish an interreligious dialogue, but the State can play a role as a religiously neutral facilitator, supporting also the logistics and financing of such actions. The interreligious dialogue must be protected from any form of politicization (Rouban, 2003) and carried out in keeping with the democratic principles of religious freedom.

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## Notes

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- <sup>(1)</sup> FoRB (Freedom of Religion or Belief) is a universally recognized acronym to designate religious freedom.
- <sup>(2)</sup> OSCE Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting 1986; Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, 1990; OSCE Istanbul Document 1999; OSCE Bucharest Plan of Action for Combatting Terrorism 2011; OSCE Ministerial Council, Declaration No. 4/03 Tolerance and Non-Discrimination (Maastricht, 2 December 2003); OSCE Ministerial Council, Declaration No. 2/08 Ministerial Declaration on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (Helsinki, 5 December 2008); OSCE, Declaration by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office at the High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Astana, 2010; OSCE Ministerial Council, Declaration No. 3/13 Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief, (Kyiv, 6 December 2013).

- (3) The Maastricht Ministerial Decision 4/03 “emphasizes the importance of a continued and strengthened interfaith and intercultural dialogue to promote greater tolerance, respect and mutual understanding;” The Kyiv Ministerial Decision 3/13 calls on participating States to “promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships;” The Ministerial Council Meeting in Helsinki, 2008: recognizes “that human rights are best respected in democratic societies, where decisions are taken with maximum transparency and broad participation. We support a pluralistic civil society and encourage partnerships between different stakeholders in the promotion and protection of human rights.”
- (4) The country’s most impactful public health campaign was initiated in 2015-2016 by His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It encouraged blood giving, a campaign repeated every year, available at: <https://basilica.ro/a-inceput-campania-doneaza-sange-salveaza-o-viata-editia-2022/> [Accessed on: 02.12.2023].
- (5) Example: Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF); Finn Church Aid, and the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.
- (6) The Consultative Council of Religious Faiths in Romania, available at: [https://adevarul.ro/locale/constant/consiliul-consultativ-cultelor-romania-mesaj-credinciosi-stati-case-urmariti-slujbele-radio-televizor-online-1\\_5e881cfd5163ec42716d6713/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/locale/constant/consiliul-consultativ-cultelor-romania-mesaj-credinciosi-stati-case-urmariti-slujbele-radio-televizor-online-1_5e881cfd5163ec42716d6713/index.html) [Accessed on: 02.12.2023].
- (7) The Interreligious Council of Albania, available at: <https://knfsh.al/en/historiku-i-knfsh-se/> [Accessed on: 02.12.2023].
- (8) Decisions adopted by the Governing Board of the National Council for Combating Discrimination in the period 2008 – present, available at: [https://www.cncd.ro/hotarari/?\\_sft\\_criteriu=religie&\\_sft\\_anul\\_publicarii=2022](https://www.cncd.ro/hotarari/?_sft_criteriu=religie&_sft_anul_publicarii=2022) [Accessed on 02.12.2023].
- (9) The Finnish MP’s case, available at: <https://adfinternational.org/free-speech-victory-finnish-mp-wins-trial-over-bible-tweet/> [Accessed on 02.12.2023].
- (10) The establishment of the Centre for Pontifical and Ancient Christian Literature Studies, available at: <https://www.csplca.com/istoric/> [Accessed on: 02.12.2023].
- (11) Interreligious dialogue regarding the Romanian Population and Housing Census, available at: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/webinar-pe-tema-recensamantului-populatiei-si-locuintelor-rpl2021-adresat-reprezentantilor-cultelor-religioase-si-ai-minoritatilor-nationale/> [Accessed on: 02.12.2023].

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