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**D5.3 Evaluation Report – Final Conference**

**Beyond Protection: Imagining the Places of Worship in Europe**

Date: 27th February 2025



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**Acknowledgement**

This document was co-funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund.

**Authorising Organisation**

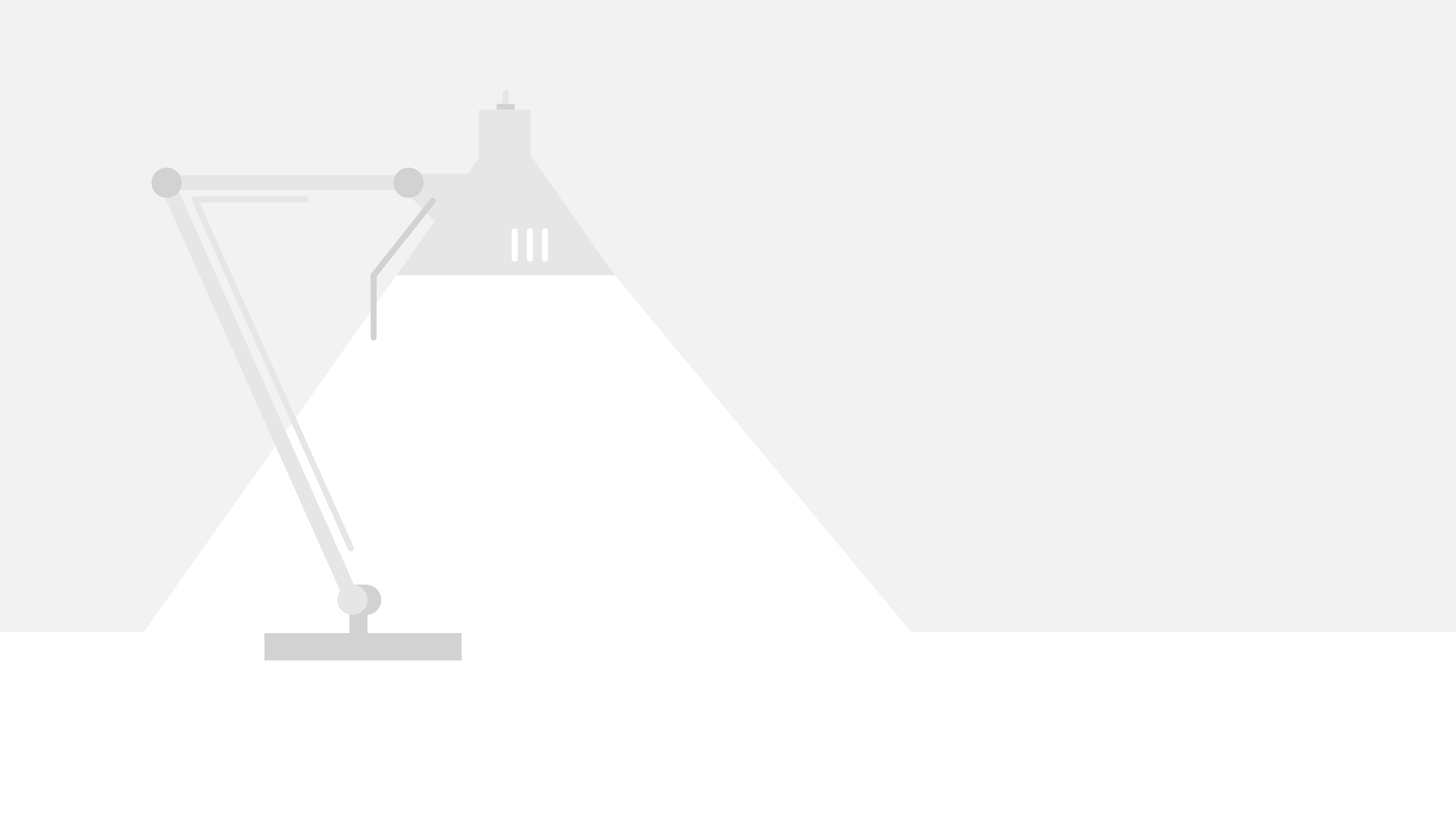
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**List of acronyms/abbreviations**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Protone | Protone: Protect the Places of Worship – Harmonising Diversity |
| PoW | Places of Worship |
| EC | European Commission |
| ULei | Leiden University |
| LUCSor | Leiden University Centre for the Study of Religion |
| IDP | Intercultural Dialogue Platform |
| SDUB | Stiftung Dialog Und Bildung |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisations |

1. **Executive Summary:**

The Protone ProjectFinal Conference was organised by Istituto Tevere, IDP and Arco Forum in Rome at Pontificia Università della Santa Croce on January 29, 2025. It brought together religious leaders, scholars, policymakers, and interfaith organizations to explore the evolving role of places of worship in Europe. The conference provided a multidisciplinary platform to discuss security, social integration, legal frameworks, and interfaith cooperation in safeguarding religious spaces.

## Key Themes and Discussions:

### Ethnographic and Sociological Perspectives

Research findings highlighted the ambivalent role of religion in security—both as a risk factor and as a force for social cohesion. The sociological imagination was emphasized as a tool to rethink traditional security frameworks and promote inclusive spaces of worship.

### Legal Frameworks and Religious Freedom

Scholars called for stronger legal protections for minority religious communities, ensuring equal access to worship spaces. The session underscored the need for policy reforms to address bureaucratic and financial barriers that disproportionately affect non-dominant religious groups.

### Transnational and Political Perspectives

Religious diplomacy was identified as crucial for protecting religious freedoms on a European scale. Discussions highlighted the historical contributions of Islam to European civilization and the need to revise educational curricula to foster a more inclusive understanding of religious heritage.

**Intercultural and Interfaith Cooperation**

Experts stressed the importance of interfaith dialogue in building trust and resilience within religious communities. The establishment of the Interreligious Council for Peace and Security was seen as a key step toward ongoing collaboration among faith groups.

**Key Outcomes and Next Steps**

* Strengthening legal and policy measures to ensure the protection of places of worship.
* Enhancing education and historical awareness to promote religious inclusion.
* Expanding interfaith collaboration to reinforce religious spaces as hubs of peace and coexistence.

Overall, the conference successfully underscored the urgent need for holistic protection of religious spaces while reimagining them as symbols of unity, peace, and coexistence across Europe.

1. **Objectives:**

The Protone Project Final Conference, Beyond Protection: Imagining the Places of Worship in Europe, aimed to explore the multifaceted role of religious spaces through an interdisciplinary lens while building on the achievements of previous symposia.

The PROTONE/Harmonising Diversity Project, launched in 2023, brought together eight organizations from Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany to examine the security and protection of religious spaces across different faith traditions. Initially focusing on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim places of worship, the project expanded to include sacred spaces of all religions, ensuring a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to religious diversity and security.

Following the first symposium in Berlin and the second in Madrid, the third interfaith symposium took place in Rome on November 20, 2024, gathering religious leaders, scholars, and policymakers from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Bahá’í traditions. This milestone event strengthened interfaith collaboration and collective strategies for safeguarding sacred spaces, fostering dialogue, and enhancing cross-cultural cooperation in security measures.

The final conference in Rome on January 29, 2025, built on these discussions, moving beyond security concerns to envision religious spaces as cultural, social, and spiritual hubs in contemporary Europe. The program began with an ethnographic analysis, presenting research findings on the lived experiences of religious communities and the challenges they faced. A sociological discussion followed, examining the evolving role of places of worship in fostering community cohesion.

A legal panel addressed policy and governance frameworks, emphasizing the protection of religious freedoms and the equitable treatment of minority faiths. The transnational discussion explored the geopolitical and diplomatic dimensions of religious spaces, highlighting the importance of interfaith diplomacy and international cooperation in ensuring their protection. The final session brought together representatives from various interfaith projects, discussing inclusive and sustainable approaches for the future of religious spaces.

By integrating academic, legal, sociological, and interfaith perspectives, the conference sought to redefine places of worship not only as sites for religious practice but as symbols of unity, peace, and coexistence across Europe.

1. **Event Planning and Preparation:**

The planning for the Protone Project Final Conference began immediately after the third interfaith symposium of 20th of November 2024. The initial steps involved confirming the event producer and securing a suitable venue, with efforts intensifying in early December once Istituto Tevere had completed the evaluation report for the November symposium. Given the tight timeline between the two events, planning required efficiency and adaptability.

One of the key challenges was finding a venue that did not require ID cards for entry, unlike *Il Pitigliani*, which hosted the third symposium. This requirement had previously complicated logistics, so organizers sought a more accessible location. With 2025 being the Jubilee Year, there was also a strong preference for a Catholic venue, ensuring a balanced representation following the previous symposium at a Jewish cultural center. However, alternative locations, including museums, were also considered before securing the *Pontificia Università della Santa Croce* - a well-connected, centrally located venue with good lighting, seating, and on-site assistance for any logistical needs.

Another major difficulty was the tight turnaround between the November 20, 2024, symposium and the final conference on January 29, 2025. Many involved in the planning process were still recovering from the previous event, making it challenging to maintain momentum. Additionally, the holiday season - spanning Christmas, New Year’s, and Epiphany - significantly delayed confirmations from speakers, adding nearly three weeks to the coordination process.

Catering arrangements also required careful consideration. The team prioritised fair pricing and ensured that the menu offered diverse options to accommodate various dietary needs, including vegetarian and halal choices.

1. **Event Execution:**

The Protone Project Final Conference, titled Beyond Protection: Imagining the Places of Worship in Europe, was a one-day event held on January 29, 2025, at the Pontificia Università della Santa Croce in Rome. Organized by Istituto Tevere, IDP, and Arco Forum, the conference aimed to present research findings and explore the role of religious spaces through an interdisciplinary approach. Key discussions covered ethnographic, sociological, legal, and geopolitical perspectives on places of worship, emphasizing their function as social and cultural hubs beyond security concerns.

Final Conference Proceedings

08:30 - 09:00 | Welcoming and Registration  
The conference began with a formal registration period, allowing participants to network before the sessions commenced. The staff of Istituto Tevere were there beforehand to welcome even the early participants.

09:00 - 09:40 | Opening Remarks

**Cenap Aydin** welcomed attendees, emphasizing the significance of the Protone Project and previous symposia held in Berlin and Madrid. He highlighted the conference's role in fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on religious spaces.

**Rev. Prof. Fernando Puig**

The Rector of Pontificia Università della Santa Croce offered his reflections, underscoring universities as essential spaces for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. He expressed gratitude for hosting the event, reinforcing the need for academic collaboration on security and religious spaces.

## Special Address by Imam Nader Akkad

Imam Nader Akkad emphasized fraternity and interfaith collaboration, drawing upon Vatican diplomatic efforts, such as Pope Francis' Fratelli Tutti and Laudato Si’. He connected these values to the Protone Project's mission of transforming places of worship into inclusive and open spaces, citing the Great Mosque of Rome's commitment to interfaith engagement.

**Partner Acknowledgments**  
*Cenap Aydin* introduced project partners, inviting representatives to provide brief greetings:

* ***Massimo Ronco*** *(Intercultural Dialogue Platform)* discussed the project's holistic approach to security, combining legal, sociological, and technological perspectives with interfaith dialogue.
* ***Tahir Abbas*** *(University of Leiden)* presented the project's research findings, including surveys with 3,600 respondents.
* ***Hilal Deniz*** *(Stiftung Dialog und Bildung)* reflected on coordinating symposia in Berlin, Madrid, and Rome, emphasizing the need for continued interfaith cooperation.
* ***Kübra Dalkılıç*** *(House of One)* highlighted the importance of interfaith councils in addressing security concerns and fostering religious literacy.
* ***Shivaraja Deva*** *(Religions for Peace Italy)* stressed the shared spiritual values among different faith traditions, advocating for mutual understanding to prevent conflicts.
* ***Temir Naziri*** *(Arco Forum)* recounted the Madrid symposium and the formation of the Interfaith Council, underlining ongoing efforts beyond the project’s official timeline.
* ***Alexandre Thiry*** *(Fedactio)* elaborated on their initiatives, including workshops, interfaith dinners, and risk assessment methodologies for religious sites.

# ****09:45-11:00 | Beyond Protection: Ethnographic Imagination****

## Presentation of the Research Report

**Professor Tahir Abbas (University of Leiden) and Leiden Research Team; Irene Trebeschi & Paul Wabnitz**

## Introduction

The presentation by Professor Tahir Abbas and the Leiden Research Team at the conference *Beyond Protection: Ethnographic Imagination* focused on the findings of a comprehensive research report examining security and safety concerns surrounding places of worship for the three major Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—across Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Grounded in empirical research and real-world observations, the session aimed to spark discussions on the future of religious protection. This report presents key findings on security measures, safety perceptions, and integration experiences of religious communities, analyzing survey data from Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and other religious groups. It identifies patterns in security concerns, explores how safety measures influence perceptions, and examines the broader social and political contexts affecting religious communities, including the impact of recent global events.

### Methodology

The research was conducted under the European Proton Project, which sought to assess security conditions in religious spaces. The study was carried out from September 2023 to March 2024 and involved:

* **43 interviews** with faith leaders to understand their roles in religious communities and security matters.
* **12 expert interviews** with researchers in fields such as security, religion, and counter-terrorism.
* **Five focus groups** across the four countries, both online and in-person, to gather congregants' perspectives.
* **Ethnographic research**, conducted by lead researcher Meta Memova, which provided additional qualitative insights.

The study was impacted by the unfolding events in the Middle East, which influenced perceptions of security and interfaith relations during the research period.

### Key Findings

1. **Rising Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism:** The research confirmed an increase in religious discrimination across Europe, particularly targeting Muslim and Jewish communities.
2. **Declining Religious Participation:** While religiosity is decreasing in Europe, Christianity remains dominant in countries like Italy and Spain.
3. **Security Measures in Places of Worship:**
   * Christian churches generally maintain open-door policies.
   * Synagogues and mosques tend to have stricter security protocols, with synagogues implementing the highest level of security measures.
   * Muslim communities express concerns that heightened security measures could lead to further securitization and surveillance.
4. **Legal Recognition and Security Access:** The ability to rent or own a place of worship and the level of security implemented are heavily influenced by legal recognition and integration into the broader social environment.

### Survey Insights

A significant portion of the research involved a structured survey designed to explore how religious communities perceive and address security threats.

* **Survey Scope:**
  + Conducted among 3,598 respondents across Spain, Italy, Germany, and Belgium.
  + Included 26 key questions with an emphasis on security, interfaith relations, and the impact of political events on worship practices.
  + Targeted individuals who were over 18, had lived in the EU for at least ten years, and regularly attended places of worship.
* **Major Themes:**
  + Religious Community and Security Perception: Respondents shared their feelings about safety in their places of worship and the impact of external threats.
  + Effects of Political Events: The study examined how geopolitical developments, particularly in the Middle East, influenced worship patterns and security concerns.
  + Security Measures and Religious Expression: The research assessed whether heightened security measures enhanced or hindered the religious experience.
* **Data Collection:**
  + The team relied on the Proton Project network to distribute the survey.
  + A panel company was engaged to broaden the respondent pool.
  + The survey successfully over-sampled Muslim and Jewish respondents to ensure robust comparative analysis across all three religious groups.

## ****Key Findings and Implications on Religious Community Security and Safety Perceptions****

### ****1.**** Security Measures and Implementation

* Jewish and Muslim places of worship have the highest adoption rates of security measures.
  + **90% of Jewish (other) and 83% of Muslim (other) communities** have implemented CCTV systems.
  + Armed protection is more accepted among Jewish communities than among Christian respondents.
* **Despite heightened security measures, there is no significant positive relationship between security measures and safety perception** in our linear regression analysis.
* **Armed protection negatively influences the perception of safety.**
  + Having armed guards does not necessarily increase feelings of safety.
  + **Christian respondents feel more negatively impacted by armed protection than Jewish respondents.**
  + Jewish respondents have a slightly higher desire for security, often reflecting higher degrees of security measures already in place.
  + Security concerns for Jewish and Muslim communities reflect challenges related to antisemitism and Islamophobia.
* **Screening measures, such as metal detectors and ID checks, do not improve safety perceptions** even though they are seen as positive security measures.

### ****2.**** Safety Perception by Religious Group

* **Muslim and Jewish respondents report the highest perceived levels of unsafety.**
* Christian and non-religious groups generally feel safer, but Christian minorities in urban areas express higher security concerns than majority Christian groups.
* **When mapped on a scale of safety perception from high to low:**
  + **Jewish (Hasidic & Ashkenazi) and Shia Muslim groups report the lowest levels of safety perception.**
  + **Christian majority groups report the highest safety perception.**
* Urban-rural differences are relatively small, but urban Christian minorities report more concerns about security than their rural counterparts.
* **Shia Muslim respondents report the lowest probability of feeling safe.**

### ****3.**** Integration and Recognition

* **High levels of community integration do not always correlate with increased feelings of safety.**
  + **Turkish Muslims:** 91% feel integrated, yet only 17% feel safe.
  + Jewish and Muslim groups tend to feel isolated in urban spaces, lacking strong support networks.
* **Faith leadership responsibility in security varies significantly:**
  + Dutch, Croatian, Sudanese, and Yemeni respondents emphasize strong faith leader responsibility for security.
  + **Jewish Reform groups:** 77% demand more security, but only 71% trust their faith leaders.
  + **Muslim groups:** Moderate faith leader reliance, with **higher reliance among Shia Muslims.**
  + **Hasidic Jewish communities reflect decentralized accountability, with congregations assuming more responsibility.**
* **Low integration communities report higher perceptions of safety threats.**
* Communities with higher reported violent attack rates place greater security responsibility on faith leaders.

### ****4.**** Generational and Cultural Differences

* **No significant relationship between age and safety perception was found.**
* **Young adults across religious groups report lower safety perceptions than older adults.**
  + Young people may be more sensitive to threats or more actively engaged in communal activism.
* **Older adults report slightly higher safety perceptions**, potentially due to stronger institutional trust and social normalization.
* **Urban youth feel higher insecurity compared to rural youth.**
  + **Muslim youth in cities are 1.5 times more likely to feel unsafe than their Christian counterparts.**
* **Among Jewish groups, Hasidic Jews are the most vulnerable in urban areas.**
* **Shia Muslims report greater urban insecurity than Sunnis.**

### ****5.**** Impact of October 7th Events on Religious Communities

* **Jewish and Muslim communities report significant impacts on worship practices and communal life.**
* **Jewish Reform communities:**
  + 70% report disruptions to their place of worship.
  + 65% report community confusion.
* **Shia Muslim communities:**
  + 40% report disruptions to their place of worship.
  + 50% report community confusion.
* **Jewish communities feel highly visible yet isolated, avoiding outward displays of religious identity.**
* **80% of Hasidic Jews feel unsafe at their place of worship.**
* **90% of Muslim (other) respondents report experiencing hate crimes.**
* **Public expression vs. societal tensions:**
  + **100% of Hasidic Jews feel comfortable with public expressions of faith.**
  + **98% of other Jewish groups report experiencing societal tensions.**
* **Diverging views within Jewish communities on Israel-Palestine issues reflect internal complexities.**
* **Christians, especially majority Christian groups, report minimal impact from the October 7th events.**
* **Religious diversity is highly valued among Jewish, Muslim, and other religious minorities, despite security concerns.**

## ****Policy Implications and Recommendations****

### ****1.**** Security Strategies Must Be Tailored to Specific Religious Groups

* **A one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective.**
* **Jewish and Muslim communities require more targeted security strategies** that consider **antisemitism and Islamophobia.**
* Urban youth-focused security measures should be strengthened, especially for **Muslim young people in cities.**

### ****2.**** Addressing the Security Paradox in Integrated Communities

* **Integration does not automatically lead to a feeling of safety.**
* Communities with high integration but low safety perception (e.g., Turkish Muslims) may require **greater state support and public awareness campaigns.**

### ****3.**** Faith Leader and Community Involvement in Security

* **Security models should consider faith leader roles and communal accountability.**
* **Decentralized security responsibility (e.g., Hasidic Jewish communities) should be studied for broader applications.**

### ****4.**** Generational Differences in Security Perception Must Inform Future Policies

* **Youth engagement initiatives should be prioritized** to address heightened insecurity among young religious minorities.
* **Older generations may require trust-building initiatives with younger religious members.**

### ****5.**** Post-October 7th Security Needs Require Urgent Action

* **Jewish and Muslim places of worship need stronger protection post-October 7th, given increased targeting.**
* **Governments should provide security funding for minority religious communities.**

### ****6.**** The Role of Religious Diversity in Security Planning

* **Jewish, Muslim, and other minority religious groups highly value interfaith dialogue and diversity.**
* Policies should **encourage cross-community discussions** on security and support **collaborative security initiatives.**

## ****Conclusion****

This report highlights the complex relationship between security measures, safety perceptions, and religious integration across different communities. While Jewish and Muslim places of worship face heightened security threats—driven in part by rising Islamophobia and anti-Semitism—implementing security measures does not always translate to an increased sense of safety. Additionally, integration into broader society, while beneficial, does not necessarily reduce security concerns, underscoring the need for policies that go beyond social cohesion efforts. The research emphasizes the importance of tailored security approaches that balance protection with religious freedom. As Europe experiences shifts in religiosity and evolving political tensions, policymakers, religious institutions, and security organizations must adopt proactive measures to create safer and more inclusive spaces for worship. The Leiden Research Team stresses that this study is not just an academic exercise but a call for ongoing dialogue and action. The full report provides further insights and recommendations for future policy and community engagement strategies.

**Q&A** on Beyond Protection: Ethnographic Imagination **-** “The presentation of the findings of the Research Report”

## ****Introduction****

Cenap Aydin opened the Q&A session by thanking Tahir Abbas, Irene, and Paul for their presentation. He acknowledged the challenges faced in gathering data and working on the document. He invited attendees to come forward to ask questions to ensure visibility and audibility, as online participants could not see those asking questions in person.

### ****Questions and Responses****

##### **Question by Alexandre Thiry:**

1. Have there been cases where Christian groups requested even fewer security measures than currently in place?
2. Why are Christians and Muslims the least receptive to CCTV security measures?

**Response by Tahir Abbas:**

* Security concerns vary among different religious groups. Some groups, especially Muslims, fear surveillance and stigmatization due to Islamophobia, leading to their resistance to security measures like CCTV.
* Christian groups, being in majority settings, often experience security issues like vandalism and theft rather than physical attacks.
* Some Christian faith leaders believe in keeping places of worship open despite risks, though their congregations may find this approach naive.

##### **Question by Paul Weller:**

1. Why was a 10-year residency requirement chosen for participants in the study instead of 5 years?
2. Were the data from London and Amsterdam intentionally included in the study?

**Response by Paul Wabnitz & Tahir Abbas:**

* The 10-year residency requirement was chosen to ensure respondents had established themselves in their respective European locations and engaged with places of worship.
* London was not intentionally included due to the EU focus, but Amsterdam had some respondents. The impact of these inclusions on results is minimal due to their small sample size.
* The research team will assess the impact of including or excluding these responses in the final research report.

##### **Question by Nazgul Nesin**

1. How did you account for biases in measuring perceptions?
2. Did you analyze differences in safety perceptions by gender or socio-economic status?

**Response by Tahir Abbas:**

* The study used attitudinal statements adapted from existing surveys, tested for neutrality and validity.
* Sampling was done through a panel company to ensure demographic representation.
* Further analysis, including regression modeling, will be conducted to assess gender and socio-economic variations in perceptions of safety.

##### ****Question by Roberto Cipriani****

1. Why does the statistical representation of Spain appear different from other countries?
2. How were participants selected to ensure representative results?
3. Why rural areas were not significantly included in the study?

**Response by Tahir Abbas:**

* The study focused on four cities: Rome, Madrid, Berlin, and Brussels, with surveys, focus groups, and ethnographic observations conducted there.
* The survey was open to all participants simultaneously, and adjustments were made to balance representation where necessary.
* The study's focus was on urban, cosmopolitan environments due to their diverse religious and social interactions.

## ****Conclusion****

Cenap Aydin closed the session by thanking all participants for their contributions. He announced a coffee break and informed online participants that the session would resume in 30 minutes. The research team will finalize a detailed report and make it available online for further reference.

## ****11:45-12:45 | Beyond Protection: Sociological Imagination****

Prof. David Lehmann (University of Cambridge, UK)

Prof. Paul Weller (University of Oxford, UK)

**Moderator:** Prof. Roberto Cipriani (Roma Tre University)

Introduction

The session titled “Beyond Protection: Sociological Imagination” was held from 11:45 to 12:45, featuring distinguished speakers Professor David Lehmann (University of Cambridge, UK) and Professor Paul Weller (University of Oxford, UK), moderated by Professor Roberto Cipriani (Roma Tre University). This discussion was framed around the concept of sociological imagination, originally introduced by Charles Wright Mills, and its relevance to the protection of places of worship. The speakers explored how social structures create challenges and how sociological imagination can help formulate solutions beyond conventional approaches to security.

**Moderator's Introduction – Prof. Roberto Cipriani** Professor Cipriani began the session by reflecting on the title and its connection to Mills' seminal work, “The Sociological Imagination,” published 65 years ago. He noted that Mills emphasized how individuals often perceive their struggles as personal rather than structural. The same perspective applies to the protection of places of worship—security concerns are not just individual issues but rooted in broader societal structures. Cipriani suggested that imagination is key in developing solutions that go beyond physical protection, fostering a sense of trust and inclusion for worshippers.

He also introduced an alternative interpretation of the term “Protone,” reading it as “ProtoONE,” which could imply “protecting all.” He connected this to Mills’ ideas about power structures, referencing Mills’ books on “White Collar” and “The Power Elite” to emphasize that security concerns must be considered within the broader framework of power dynamics in society.

**Keynote Speech – Prof. David Lehmann** Professor Lehmann brought an international perspective to the discussion, drawing from his extensive research in Latin America. He highlighted how protection issues extend beyond Europe and are deeply intertwined with ethnic, religious, and social justice concerns. His work on development studies, ethnicity, and postcolonial challenges provided valuable insights into how different societies address the security of religious spaces.

Lehmann argued that religious places of worship are not merely physical structures but symbols of identity, history, and power. He emphasized that security strategies should incorporate cultural and social dimensions rather than relying solely on law enforcement measures. Additionally, he pointed out how different countries’ historical and colonial legacies shape their approaches to religious security and pluralism.

**Keynote Speech – Prof. Paul Weller** Professor Weller, an expert in discrimination, equality, human rights, and freedom of religion, focused on the interplay between empirical data, legal frameworks, and sociological perspectives in shaping security policies. He highlighted how statistics and qualitative research can inform policies that balance protection with human rights.

Weller also emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue in promoting security. He referenced his extensive work in interreligious dialogue and pluralism, particularly in the UK, and stressed that cooperation between religious communities, policymakers, and scholars is crucial in developing inclusive and effective security measures. He reiterated that security must not lead to excessive control, citing the heavy presence of guards around Saint Peter’s Square as an example of measures that may provide security but also create unease.

## David Lehmann’s Talk

**Introduction** David Lehmann, though not an expert on Europe, presented insights from his research on religious spaces, particularly focusing on the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). His discussion explored the concept of “defensible space” in religious practice, particularly in Western Europe, where religious communities often face security challenges.

**Religious Security and Defensible Space** Lehmann addressed concerns regarding the safety of religious practices in public spaces. He noted that despite Western Europe's reputation for religious tolerance, faith communities often feel vulnerable when practicing their religion openly. In contrast, Eastern Europe, despite its history of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, has not witnessed similar high-profile attacks.

He emphasized that religious spaces often serve as symbolic and physical separations between sacred and secular spheres. This applies particularly to Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as to certain Christian groups such as Pentecostals and Methodists. Security measures, including guarded entrances and surveillance, have become a common feature of religious gatherings.

**Pentecostalism and the Growth of Neo-Pentecostalism** Lehmann delved into Pentecostalism, particularly the rise of neo-Pentecostalism, which differs significantly from traditional forms. While classical Pentecostalism was characterized by small, modest places of worship, neo-Pentecostalism has embraced grand architectural projects, such as the Temple of Solomon in São Paulo, Brazil.

Neo-Pentecostal churches like the UCKG emphasize:

* **Prosperity Gospel:** Encouraging donations as a path to financial and spiritual success.
* **Exorcisms:** Conducted publicly as a central practice.
* **Global Expansion:** Following migration patterns, these churches have spread across Europe, Africa, and Latin America.
* **High Visibility:** Large, imposing structures replace the low-profile chapels of classical Pentecostalism.

**The Role of Security in Religious Spaces** Lehmann highlighted the extensive security measures implemented by neo-Pentecostal churches, particularly the UCKG. For instance:

* The Temple of Solomon in Brazil requires attendees to pass through airport-style security checks, prohibiting electronic devices inside.
* The London UCKG headquarters (formerly the Rainbow Theatre) is heavily staffed with assistants ensuring controlled access.
* These security measures not only ensure safety but also serve as symbolic markers distinguishing religious spaces from secular environments.

**Challenges and Controversies** Lehmann discussed ethical and regulatory concerns surrounding neo-Pentecostal institutions:

* Many offer counselling and addiction recovery programs without professional oversight.
* In some countries, such as Brazil and Guatemala, these churches receive government subsidies, raising concerns about the blurred lines between religion and politics.
* Religious leaders push for greater tax exemptions, advocating for personal income tax exemptions for pastors.

Paul Weller’s Talk**: The Sociological Imagination with a Religious Studies Twist**

### Introduction

Paul Weller's presentation at the conference provided a reflective and forward-looking perspective on the Protone project and its implications for religious studies, sociological imagination, and policy development regarding places of worship in Europe. His discussion intertwined C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination with religious studies methodologies to offer insights into the current project and potential future directions.

### Disciplinary Transparency and Methodological Approach

Weller emphasized his disciplinary position within religious studies rather than strictly sociology, noting his engagement with phenomenological methods while also incorporating social scientific approaches. He underscored the importance of **contextuality and positionality** in religious studies, stating that while these are necessary, they must be complemented by broader analytical frameworks.

### Application of the Sociological Imagination to the Protone Project

The sociological imagination, as formulated by Mills, critiques grand theory and abstracted empiricism in favor of intellectual craftsmanship. Weller identified several ways in which the Protone project aligns with this approach:

1. **Integration of Scholarship and Community Engagement**: The project has effectively combined academic research with practical engagement in religious communities, ensuring that theoretical insights are grounded in real-world contexts.
2. **Multiplicity of Research Components**: The project does not rely on a single empirical study but instead integrates literature reviews, country-specific studies, training programs, fieldwork, and city-related surveys.
3. **Establishing Anchor Points**: The project must now determine its key learning points and overarching conclusions based on the diverse data collected.
4. **Public Impact and Communication**: Weller highlighted the importance of presenting findings clearly to policymakers, scholars, and the general public to maximize the project's impact.
5. **Beyond Officially Formulated Public Issues**: While the project aligns with EU concerns about the security of places of worship, it should also maintain an openness to broader and innovative research directions.

### Future Directions Beyond Protone

Weller outlined several potential future research and policy initiatives:

1. **Building on Existing Data and Products**
   * Enhancing the use of the Protone project's findings within both academic and policymaking spheres.
2. **Strengthening the Interfaith Council for Security of Places of Worship**
   * Ensuring that the council, established in Rome, becomes a sustainable entity by securing funding and fostering strategic alliances with European bodies such as the European Network on Religion and Belief and Religions for Peace Europe.
3. **Legal Protections and Policy Advocacy**
   * Identifying and lobbying for legal measures to protect places of worship, recognizing the importance of legal systems in restraining potential threats.
4. **Mutual Support Systems for Places of Worship**
   * Establishing practical mechanisms for solidarity and support among religious communities when places of worship face threats or attacks.

### Potential Future Projects (Protone 2-6)

1. **Protone 2: Expanding the Scope of Religious Sites**
   * Extending research to include Hindu mandirs, Sikh gurdwaras, and other non-Abrahamic places of worship in Europe.
2. **Protone 3: Focusing on Minority Christian Communities**
   * Investigating security challenges faced by Black and other ethnic minority Christian communities, addressing the intersection of racism and religious discrimination.
3. **Protone 4: Examining Eastern and Central Europe**
   * Expanding the research focus beyond Western Europe to uncover regional variations in security threats and protection measures.
4. **Protone 5: Comparative International Study**
   * Conducting comparative research on the protection of places of worship in the USA, India, or Latin America to gain global insights.
5. **Protone 6: Establishing Consistent Statistical Definitions**
   * Developing standardized criteria for measuring attacks on places of worship to ensure reliable and comparable data across European countries.

## Conclusion

The session offered a profound exploration of the evolving dynamics surrounding the protection of places of worship, combining academic perspectives with practical applications. Weller’s talk emphasized the significance of sociological imagination, linking theory to real-world concerns, particularly around the integration of religious spaces into society. His vision for expanding research, promoting interfaith dialogue, and advocating for stronger legal protections forms a solid foundation for safeguarding places of worship across Europe and beyond.

Lehmann’s insights into the evolution of religious spaces, particularly in Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements, illuminated the complex interplay between security, visibility, and spiritual function. The notion of “defensible space” remains crucial in understanding how religious communities balance safety concerns with their core spiritual practices.

The session reinforced that security for places of worship must be addressed from a holistic perspective. The key takeaways emphasized the importance of:

* Using sociological imagination to rethink traditional security frameworks.
* Recognizing that security challenges are structural and require systemic solutions.
* Employing interdisciplinary approaches combining sociology, law, and religious studies.
* Considering international perspectives, given regional variations in security concerns.
* Striking a balance between security and the welcoming nature of religious spaces.

These discussions fostered a deeper understanding of how to integrate sociological insights into policies for the protection of places of worship, ensuring both security and inclusivity. The inclusion of perspectives from diverse religious communities, such as those represented by the Muslim and Christian participants, further enriched the conversation, highlighting the importance of accommodating diverse spiritual needs while maintaining a shared commitment to safety.

In reflecting on historical cases, such as the defense of temples in India, the dialogue moved from theoretical ideas to real-world implications, illustrating the need for ongoing, adaptive approaches to safeguarding sacred spaces. The conversation also acknowledged the historical and cultural intersections of religious identity and national identity, such as the role of churches in shaping community identities across Europe.

Ultimately, the session successfully underscored the complex, multifaceted nature of religious space protection, pointing towards a future where security and inclusivity are balanced in a way that respects both tradition and innovation.

## ****Q&A Session****

The Q&A session provided a dynamic exchange of insights, reflecting on key themes related to the security, secularization, and inclusivity of places of worship. The discussion explored diverse perspectives on Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements, the Protone project, and the challenges faced by religious minorities, particularly Muslim women, in accessing religious spaces.

### ****Key Discussions and Responses****

## ****1.** Pentecostalism, Neo-Pentecostalism, and Security in Brazil**

Cenap opened the floor for questions regarding the expansion of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches in Brazil and their relationship with security and secularization. He acknowledged Professor Weller’s research contributions and emphasized the importance of considering the broader sociopolitical impact of religious spaces.

Professor David Lehmann responded to a question from Arhan Kardas regarding the architectural elements of a church resembling the Temple of Solomon in Brazil. He explained that while the building incorporates certain biblical proportions and symbols such as the menorah, it also incorporates modern technology. He highlighted the broader significance of these structures in shaping religious identity, noting that the church operates as a media empire, owning one of Brazil’s largest television networks.

## ****2.** The Protone Project and Its Future Prospects**

Dr. Luigi De Salvia, representing Religions for Peace, underscored the importance of continuity in the Protone project. He stressed the need for further research and collaboration, particularly through the Interfaith Council for Peace and Security. He highlighted the project's role in fostering dialogue, networking, and shared learning among religious communities, reinforcing the value of interdisciplinary and interfaith approaches.

Cenap acknowledged logistical challenges affecting participation, mentioning the absence of several invited speakers due to health and travel difficulties. However, he reaffirmed the importance of the discussions and encouraged further engagement.

## ****3.** Muslim Religious Spaces in Europe: Challenges and Inclusion**

Dr. Tehseen Nisar posed a two-part question regarding the accessibility of mosques in Europe and the challenges Muslim women face in religious public spaces. She highlighted disparities in the availability of authentic mosques, contrasting the UK model with countries like Italy, where Muslim places of worship remain limited. She also shared her personal experience of exclusion from a mosque in Sicily due to dress code policies, raising concerns about inclusivity and the marginalization of Muslim women within their own religious communities.

Professor Tahir Abbas acknowledged these concerns, stating that the accessibility and inclusivity of mosques vary widely across Europe. He recognized the importance of ongoing research to better understand and address these challenges. He noted progress in gender representation within Muslim leadership structures, citing the recent appointment of a female secretary-general in the Muslim Council of Britain. However, he also pointed out that political dynamics, such as government reluctance to engage with Muslim organizations, complicate efforts to promote gender equality and inclusivity.

## ****Key Takeaways****

* **Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Growth**: The rapid expansion of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, particularly in Brazil, raises questions about the intersection of religious architecture, media influence, and security.
* **Continuity of the Protone Project**: There is strong support for expanding research and policy discussions on religious security, with an emphasis on interfaith collaboration.
* **Diversity of Religious Spaces in Europe**: Different European countries present varying models of mosque accessibility and religious participation, highlighting the need for comparative studies.
* **Gender Inclusion in Religious Spaces**: Muslim women often face additional barriers to fully participating in religious communities, emphasizing the need for more inclusive policies and practices.

## ****Conclusion****

The Q&A session reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary research and policy development in addressing the security and inclusivity of places of worship. The discussions highlighted both challenges and opportunities in fostering a more inclusive and secure religious landscape across different traditions and geographical contexts. As the Protone project continues to evolve, further research and dialogue will be essential in ensuring that places of worship remain open, safe, and representative of their communities.

# ****14:30 – 15:30| Session: “Beyond Protection: Legal Imagination”****

# Speakers:

* Prof. Pamela Harris (John Cabot University, Rome)
* Prof. Arhan Kardas (Potsdam University, Germany)
* Prof. Ilaria Valenzi (Sapienza University, Rome)
* Moderator: Prof. Antonio Angelucci (Insubria University)

The discussion led by Professor Harris, Antonio Angelucci, and Arhan Kardas centered on the challenges faced by minority religions in securing recognized places of worship. This topic is particularly relevant in Italy and across various religious traditions. The conversation examined theological perspectives, historical contexts, and the role of law in protecting sacred spaces.

## Introduction by Prof. Antonio Angelucci

Prof. Angelucci opened the session by acknowledging the significance of integrating places of worship of non-Catholic religions into Italy’s urban and social landscape. He framed the discussion within the constitutional and administrative framework of Italy, emphasizing the balance between religious freedom (Articles 2, 3, 8, and 19 of the Italian Constitution) and practical administrative realities.

He highlighted the challenges Muslim communities face in establishing places of worship due to legal constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and the exclusion of religious activities from the Third Sector Code (2017). He also discussed the role of regional and municipal governments in regulating religious spaces, emphasizing the need for clear, non-discriminatory policies to avoid unjustified restrictions on religious freedom.

## Presentation by Prof. Pamela Harris

Prof. Harris provided insights from the perspective of the progressive Jewish community in Rome, focusing on legal recognition and its impact on religious spaces.

### Key Points from Prof. Harris’s Talk:

1. **Recognition and Legal Barriers:**
   * The recognition of religious groups by the state is essential for securing places of worship. Without it, religious communities struggle with zoning laws, financial constraints, and social acceptance.
   * The Foti Bill (currently stalled in the Italian Senate) would further restrict unrecognized religions from obtaining permits for religious spaces, disproportionately affecting Muslim and progressive Jewish communities.
2. **Economic and Social Costs of Security Measures:**
   * The securitization of places of worship imposes economic burdens and creates psychological isolation for religious minorities.
   * Foreign funding becomes a necessity for unrecognized groups, potentially leading to further discrimination and state scrutiny.
3. **The Symbolic Importance of Religious Spaces:**
   * Places of worship are more than prayer sites; they foster community and cultural identity.
   * Unrecognized religious communities often resort to using warehouses and garages due to legal and financial constraints. Prof. Harris argued that such arrangements reinforce social hierarchies and undermine the dignity of minority religions.
4. **The Case of Progressive Judaism in Rome:**
   * Despite Judaism being recognized in Italy, progressive Jewish communities face exclusion from the broader Jewish establishment.
   * Progressive Jewish groups struggle to acquire permanent worship spaces due to legal and financial barriers, including high taxation on property purchases.
   * Some communities are forced to consider registering as **cultural associations** to avoid excessive taxes, raising concerns about diluting their religious identity.
5. **Legal Imagination and a Path Forward:**
   * Prof. Harris called for a rethinking of Italy’s legal framework to ensure true equality in religious recognition.
   * She emphasized the need for **a system that prioritises dignity alongside security**, allowing all religious groups to worship in spaces that reflect their status as integral parts of Italian society.

## Conclusion

The session provided a critical analysis of the challenges faced by minority religious communities in Italy, emphasizing the role of legal recognition in securing religious freedom. The discussion underscored the need for a more inclusive and equitable legal framework that ensures all religious groups have access to dignified worship spaces, free from bureaucratic and financial discrimination.

Prof. Angelucci closed the session by acknowledging the importance of these issues in Italy and highlighting the contributions of legal scholars like Prof. Harris and their ongoing efforts to advocate for change.

## Presentation by Prof. Arhan Kardas

Arhan Kardas provided an in-depth theological and historical analysis of the Quranic principles and prophetic traditions that emphasize the protection of religious sites.

##### ****1.** The Protection of Religious Worship in Islamic Tradition**

A central Quranic verse from the chapter Hajj underscores the divine protection granted to places of worship, including churches, synagogues, monasteries, and mosques. Kardas argued that this verse highlights four essential aspects:

* **Sacredness** of worship places
* **Recognition of multiple religious traditions**
* **Prohibition of forced expulsion from worship spaces**
* **Spiritual connection between worshippers and God**

Additionally, a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad reinforces this principle, stating that even in times of war, religious figures and places of worship should be spared from destruction.

##### ****2.** Historical Precedents and Deviations**

Kardas provided historical examples where Islamic rulers upheld the protection of religious sites. One notable example was the second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, who refused to pray inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to prevent its later conversion into a mosque. This act demonstrated a commitment to religious pluralism and respect for Christian worship.

However, deviations from this practice have occurred throughout history, such as:

* The conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque by Sultan Mehmed II
* The destruction of Hindu temples by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni
* The Reconquista in Spain, where mosques and synagogues were destroyed or converted

These cases illustrate the complexity of historical decisions regarding places of worship, often influenced by political and ideological factors.

##### ****3.** The Universality of Religious Coexistence**

A key argument made during the discussion was that religious sites should serve as symbols of unity rather than division. The Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey to Jerusalem was cited as a metaphorical example of religious convergence, as he is said to have led all prophets in prayer at the Temple Mount. Kardas suggested that Jerusalem could serve as a common ground for interfaith peace, given its significance to multiple religions.

##### ****4. The Sanctity of Human Life Above Places of Worship****

A critical point raised was that while places of worship hold deep religious significance, the sanctity of human life takes precedence. A hadith from Ibn Umar states that a believer’s life and dignity are more sacred than even the Kaaba itself. This principle aligns with Jewish teachings found in the Mishnah Sanhedrin, which state that the destruction of a single soul is akin to destroying the entire world.

##### ****5.** The Earth as a Universal Place of Worship**

Kardas concluded by emphasizing that, according to Islamic teachings, the entire earth serves as a place of worship. This perspective fosters a broader vision of religious freedom, environmental responsibility, and peaceful coexistence among different faiths.

## ****Conclusion****

The discussion highlighted the theological, historical, and ethical dimensions of religious freedom and the protection of worship spaces. While Islamic tradition upholds the sanctity of places of worship, history has shown both adherence and deviations from this principle. The overarching message emphasized the need for interfaith dialogue, legal protections, and mutual respect to uphold religious freedom in modern societies.

#### ****Next Steps and Informal Discussion****

Due to time constraints, further discussion was postponed. However, attendees were encouraged to continue conversations informally during a coffee break before the next scheduled event at 4:00 PM.

# ****16:00 – 17:15 | Session: Beyond Protection: Transnational Imagination****

**Speakers:**

* Prof. Emanuela Del Re (University Uninettuno of Rome)
* Prof. Pasquale Ferrara (LUISS University, Rome)
* Prof. Mohammed Hashas (Roma Tor Vergata University)
* Moderator: Dr. Cenap Aydin (Istituto Tevere)

Introduction

The session “Beyond Protection: Transnational Imagination” focused on the broader implications of religious freedom and the protection of places of worship within a transnational context. The discussion examined the intersection of religion, politics, and societal cohesion in Europe and beyond.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Cenap Aydin opened the session by introducing Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto, Secretary General of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE). Fr. Manuel, though unable to attend in the morning, expressed his strong support for the initiative and its objectives.

## Keynote Address by Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto

Fr. Manuel provided an overview of his role at COMECE, an institution that represents the Catholic Church at the European Union level. He emphasized the importance of religious advocacy and interfaith collaboration, especially in protecting places of worship.

**Key Discussion Points:**

**1.** The Role of COMECE in Religious Advocacy

* Established in 1980, COMECE engages in dialogue with European institutions, monitoring policies that affect religious communities.
* Collaborates with the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council to ensure religious perspectives are considered in policymaking.
* Works ecumenically with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), representing Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant communities.
* Engages with Jewish and Muslim communities in Brussels to strengthen interfaith solidarity.

**2.** Protection of Places of Worship as a Fundamental Right

* COMECE actively supports projects that ensure the security of religious sites.
* The organization previously participated in the EU-funded “Prosperes” project, which aimed to safeguard places of worship.
* Religious freedom is seen as central to European values, requiring policy and legal frameworks to protect worship spaces from threats.

**3.** Challenges in Contemporary Europe

* Increasing anti-Semitism and religious intolerance were highlighted as urgent concerns.
* Rising polarization around issues of migration, often exploited for political gains, impacts the security of religious communities.
* The need for proactive strategies to combat faith-based discrimination and violence was emphasized.

**4.** The Broader Significance of Protecting Worship Spaces

* Beyond security, religious sites hold cultural and historical significance.
* Their preservation fosters social cohesion and contributes to European heritage.
* Ensuring freedom of worship strengthens democracy and pluralism.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

Fr. Manuel concluded by reiterating COMECE’s commitment to advocating for religious freedom and the protection of places of worship at the European level. He affirmed the organization’s willingness to collaborate with different faith traditions in safeguarding these sacred spaces.

The session reinforced the necessity of a transnational approach to religious protection, emphasizing collaboration between religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society. Attendees were encouraged to continue discussions informally and explore avenues for future cooperation in ensuring religious freedom across Europe.

## ****Professor Pasquale Ferrara’s Speech****

This part of the conference began with a strong introduction by Cenap Aydin, who set the stage for a discussion on transnational imagination in relation to protection and religious dialogue. He also informed attendees that Professor Emmanuella Del Re was unable to join due to illness but highlighted her significant contributions over the past four years, particularly in her roles representing the European Union in Western Africa and as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy.

The session proceeded with the introduction of Professor and Ambassador Pasquale Ferrara, Director General for Political Affairs and Security at the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. His extensive diplomatic career spans regions including South America, North America, Athens, and Algeria, where he served as the Italian Ambassador. Additionally, his academic contributions include research and teaching on religious freedom and international cooperation in various universities across Europe, including the European University Institute (IUE) in Fiesole, where he played a pivotal role in bridging international diplomacy and academia.

## Key Points from Professor Pasquale Ferrara’s Speech**:**

1. The Interplay Between Religion and Politics**:**
   * Professor Ferrara emphasized that practitioners in international relations should have a solid theoretical framework to understand global challenges.
   * His work at the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs aimed to bridge the gap between international diplomacy and religion, focusing on how religion serves as a resource for conflict resolution and prevention rather than merely as a tool for political reconciliation.

### **Religion’s Role in Global Community Building:**

* + Religion should not replace politics but can play an instrumental role in facilitating global cooperation and mutual understanding.
  + Religions inherently embrace universalism, which can be leveraged to foster a sense of a global human family.
  + He highlighted the work of organizations such as Religions for Peace in fostering interfaith dialogue and engagement beyond individual religious communities.

### **Challenges in a Transnational yet Westphalian World:**

* + The world remains transnational while being governed by national political frameworks, creating a disconnect that international relations struggles to address.
  + Religion has the potential to bridge this divide by transcending national identities and creating a sense of shared global belonging.

### **Sacred Spaces and Their Political Implications:**

* + Religious sites like St. Peter’s Basilica and Mecca hold symbolic significance, while contested spaces like Jerusalem present diplomatic challenges.
  + He called for decoupling religion from physical places, asserting that religion is larger than national or territorial identities.

### **The Concept of Pilgrimage as a Metaphor for International Relations:**

* + Professor Ferrara used the notion of pilgrimage to illustrate the need for movement, curiosity, and engagement beyond one’s comfort zone.
  + He drew parallels between pilgrimage and political imagination, emphasizing that international relations today require planning, shared goals, and collective movement towards peace and cooperation.

Reflections and Closing Remarks**:**

Cenap Aydin thanked Professor Ferrara for his thought-provoking insights, noting how the session aligned with previous discussions on imagination in the sociological sphere. He referenced the work of theorists like Wright Mills and Benedict Anderson in conceptualizing imagined communities and the role of global fraternity.

Aydin also connected Ferrara’s points to earlier contributions by Imam Nadir Akkad, who referenced the Human Fraternity Document and Pope Francis’s call for a shared global identity. He concluded by emphasizing the need to move beyond divisive distinctions and embrace the notion of a united human family.

The session provided valuable perspectives on the intersection of religion, diplomacy, and global politics, offering a framework for understanding how religious principles can contribute to addressing contemporary international challenges.

## ****Professor Mohammed Hashas’s Speech****

The discussion, moderated by Cenap Aydin, featured a comprehensive and interdisciplinary perspective presented by Professor Mohammed Hashas on the transnational imagination of places of worship, religious identity, and the historical and sociological positioning of Islam in Europe. The conversation delved into key issues such as the externalization of Muslim communities, the role of religious institutions, and the challenges of integration within secularized European societies.

### ****Key Themes and Discussion Points****

#### **1. The Historical and Intellectual Contributions of Islam**

Professor Hashas emphasized the need for a historical approach to understanding Islam’s role in European civilization. He highlighted the intellectual contributions of Islamic scholars and the necessity of revisiting historical narratives that are often overlooked in European educational curricula. This revision is crucial in fostering a sense of belonging among Muslim communities.

#### **2. Transnational Imagination and the Role of Religion in Secular Societies**

The discussion explored the concept of “transnational imagination” and how religious and economic factors shape collective identities. Professor Hashas noted that in times of crisis, societies often reconsider their relationship with religion. He referenced scholars such as Tariq Modood and Charles Taylor, who argue for the recognition of religion as a public good, ensuring its space in secularized societies.

#### **3. Externalization and Orientalization of Muslim Communities**

A critical issue raised was the persistent externalization of Muslim identity in European discourse. Despite being an integral part of European history, Muslims continue to be portrayed as external or foreign. This phenomenon is linked to the legacy of Orientalism and political strategies that frame Islam as an outsider rather than a historical and cultural contributor to European societies.

#### **4. The Role of Education in Integration**

One of the proposed solutions to the issue of externalization is the integration of a more inclusive historical perspective in European educational systems. By revising history textbooks to accurately reflect Islamic contributions, future generations can develop a more nuanced understanding of religious diversity.

#### **5. The Role of Imams and Religious Leaders**

The discussion addressed the evolving role of imams in European societies. The expectation that imams can resolve all issues faced by Muslim communities was critiqued. There was also mention of the “super imam” concept, wherein religious leaders are positioned as ultimate mediators in socio-political affairs, an expectation that is neither practical nor sustainable.

#### **6. Women and Places of Worship**

Professor Hashas also touched on the underrepresentation of women in mosque leadership and places of worship. While there have been attempts to establish women-led or mixed-gender mosques, these efforts have faced significant challenges, including resistance from within Muslim communities and security concerns.

## ****Tribute to Massimo Rosati & Uğur Kömeçoğlu****

Cenap Aydin took a moment to commemorate the Professor Massimo Rosati, who contributed significantly to the study of religion in contemporary society. His work on religious commitment and interfaith dialogue remains influential, and his legacy continues to be honored by scholars in the field. Moreover Cenap Adin also commemorated Uğur Kömeçoğlu who was an important scholar in different topics such as identity, modernity, space, religion, gender, and everyday life.

## ****Significance of the Venue****

Aydin also provided historical context regarding the venue of the discussion, which was the original seat of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI). He acknowledged the institution’s long-standing contributions to academic research on Islam and interreligious dialogue.

## ****Conclusion****

The discussion underscored the importance of historical revision, education, and community-based approaches to fostering a more inclusive European identity for Muslims. It highlighted the need for both academic and policy-oriented efforts to bridge the gap between religious scholarship and public discourse.

The session concluded with an open floor for questions and further dialogue, allowing attendees to engage with the thought-provoking insights presented.

## ****Q&A Session****

**Introduction** The panel discussion, moderated by Cenap Aydin, addressed key issues related to the education of imams in Europe, interreligious dialogue, and the significance of religious inclusivity in a globalized world. Featuring contributions from Professors Mohammed Hashas and Pasquale Ferrara, as well as audience interventions from Arhan Kardas, Paul Weller, and Tehseen Nisar, the event explored the evolving role of religious leadership and the challenges of fostering meaningful engagement across different faith traditions.

## ****Discussion Highlights****

### ****Education of Imams in Europe****

Arhan Kardas posed a question to Professor Mohammed Hashas regarding the qualifications of imams in Europe and their capacity to engage in dialogue with Christian priests, pastors, and Jewish rabbis.

#### **Professor Mohammed Hashas’ Response**

Professor Hashas provided a detailed overview of the educational challenges faced by imams in Europe. He noted that, historically, many imams have lacked formal religious training, citing a study in France where only one out of thirty interviewed imams had received structured religious education. The primary obstacles include:

* Many imams arrive in Europe without formal training and take on religious leadership roles out of necessity rather than deliberate career choices.
* Imams often receive inadequate or no compensation, limiting their ability to pursue advanced training.
* Language barriers further hinder their ability to engage with local communities and interfaith counterparts.

However, efforts have been made to address these gaps, particularly in Germany, where theological chairs in public universities have been established to train religious leaders, educators, and community figures. Similarly, institutions such as the Cambridge Muslim College in the UK and Italy’s UCOII initiatives are working towards improving religious education and integration.

Professor Hashas also highlighted the long-term process of establishing recognized religious institutions in Europe, drawing a parallel with the historical experience of Catholic seminaries in the United States, which initially relied on Rome before developing independent educational structures.

### ****Exclusiveness of Mecca and Interreligious Dialogue****

Arhan Kardas directed a question to Professor Pasquale Ferrara regarding whether the exclusiveness of Mecca hinders interreligious dialogue.

#### ****Professor Pasquale Ferrara’s Response****

Professor Ferrara emphasized that religious exclusivity and exclusion are distinct concepts. He argued that while Mecca is a singular sacred center for Muslims, it does not necessarily exclude non-Muslims from engaging with Islamic thought or dialogue. He compared Mecca and Rome, noting that both serve as central religious hubs that attract global pilgrimages. He further highlighted the complex dynamics of religious contestation, citing Orthodox Christianity’s internal tensions between Constantinople and Moscow as an example of how religious centers can become points of debate.

### ****Interventions from Audience Members****

#### **Paul Weller’s Comment**

Paul Weller expressed appreciation for the discussion, reflecting on the balance between realism and hope in religious and social discourse. He underscored the necessity of combining pragmatic approaches with a hopeful vision to foster meaningful progress in interfaith and societal engagements.

#### **Tehseen Nisar’s Observations**

Tehseen Nisar raised two points:

1. The ambivalence of the concept of Ummah (global Muslim community) in contemporary contexts, particularly in relation to transnational capitalism and political representation.
2. The challenges faced by women in leadership roles within Muslim communities, citing the controversy surrounding a female-led sermon in the United States. She noted the persistent gender hierarchies and the need for greater inclusivity within Islamic leadership structures.

#### **Responses from the Panel**

* Professor Ferrara distinguished between transnationalism as a mere vehicle and the values it carries, arguing that religion’s universal nature should facilitate inclusion rather than division.
* Professor Hashas elaborated on the evolution of the Ummah, explaining how it has been increasingly territorialized and nationalized by political leaders. He also discussed the differing opportunities for women in religious leadership between Western and Islamic-majority contexts, emphasizing the need to consider local realities when advocating for change.

## ****Conclusion****

The panel discussion provided valuable insights into the evolving roles of religious leaders, the importance of structured theological education, and the necessity of fostering inclusive and constructive interfaith dialogue. The speakers and audience members highlighted the complexities of religious identity in modern societies and the long-term efforts required to achieve meaningful integration and cooperation. The session concluded with a round of applause in recognition of the speakers’ contributions.

# 17:15 – 18:30 | ****“Beyond Protection: Intercultural and Interfaith Imagination” Session****

**Moderator:** Dr. Luigi De Salvia (Religions for Peace)

**Speakers:**

* Yoana Barakova (PARTES)
* Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf (Religions for Peace)
* Dr. Massimo Cozzolino (SPIRIT)
* Fr. Aitor de la Morena - Pilar Arnaez (PROTONE)
* Cenap Aydin

Introduction

The session “Beyond Protection: Intercultural and Interfaith Imagination” explored the crucial role of religious communities in fostering trust, respect, and cooperation. Dr. Luigi De Salvia introduced the session, emphasizing that the protection of religious practices extends beyond security measures and requires proactive engagement from religious, social, and political institutions. The discussion built upon earlier remarks by Ambassador Pasquale Ferrara and acknowledged the efforts of Ariana Camellini, the Deputy Mayor of the Second Minister of Rome, in fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

## ****Key Themes and Discussions:****

### ****Interfaith Dialogue and Community Trust****

* + Dr. De Salvia highlighted that religious diversity should be viewed as a strength rather than a point of division. He stressed the importance of fostering trust and mutual respect among believers of different faiths as well as between religious and secular communities.

Presentation by Yoana Barakova **(PARTES Project)**

* + Yoana Barakova provided insights into the PARTES project, which started in 2023, involving 13 organizations across 10 European countries.
  + The project aims to bridge communication gaps between religious and civil society actors through interfaith forums and workshops.
  + A major focus was placed on the security of places of worship, hate crime prevention, and reducing social polarization.
  + Research findings:
    - Analysis of 380 cases of violent attacks, 16 targeted attacks, 111 hate crimes, and 11 cyberattacks against places of worship.
    - Predominantly affected religious groups were Christians, Muslims, and Jews.
    - A significant rise in attacks was observed due to geopolitical events such as the war in the Middle East and Ukraine.
    - Perpetrators included far-right extremists (37%), unidentified individuals (30%), Islamist extremists (17%), and far-left extremists (3%).
  + The PARTES Guardian approach was introduced to enhance protective measures in security, cyber awareness, community collaboration, mental health, and financial resource allocation.

### ****Challenges Identified****

* + **Stigmatization and hate crimes:** Increased religious stigmatization leading to more hate crimes.
  + **Underreporting of hate crimes:** Many religious communities lack awareness or mechanisms for reporting incidents.
  + **Security concerns:** Places of worship struggle to balance safety with openness.
  + **Cyber threats:** Increased online threats and extremist activities targeting religious institutions.
  + **Funding disparities:** Unequal allocation of resources for religious security across regions.
  + **Lack of mental health support:** Both victims and religious leaders require trauma-informed care.

### ****Proposed Solutions****

* + **Strengthening interfaith cooperation:** Encouraging collaboration between religious institutions to prevent hate speech and social fragmentation.
  + **Developing protective measures:** Implementing security training, cyber threat monitoring, and better emergency response planning.
  + **Advocating for legal and policy support:** Promoting stronger legal frameworks to safeguard religious freedoms and spaces.
  + **Enhancing community engagement:** Encouraging local leaders and organizations to take an active role in interreligious dialogue and cooperation.
  + **Funding and support:** Identifying financial resources for security initiatives, training programs, and awareness campaigns.

Conclusion

The session successfully underscored the urgent need for holistic protection of religious communities, emphasizing trust-building, interfaith dialogue, and collaborative security measures. The discussions served as a call to action for policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society organizations to work together to protect places of worship while fostering intercultural and interfaith understanding. The findings of the PARTES project and the proactive strategies proposed will be instrumental in shaping future efforts to harmonize religious diversity and ensure the safety of faith communities.

## Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf’s Address

Introduction Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf, a distinguished religious leader, shared his insights on the crucial role of interreligious cooperation in addressing security challenges in Europe. Drawing from his extensive experience as the former President of the Swiss Reform Church and his involvement with the Swiss government in security matters, as well as his engagement with Religions for Peace Europe and the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), Dr. Wipf emphasized the need for inclusivity, cooperation, and recognition of religion’s influence in societal cohesion and security.

Consideration 1: Security and Religion

Dr. Wipf highlighted that for years, national security reports in Europe largely ignored the role of religion, often considering it solely as a risk factor. He pointed out that religion is indeed ambivalent—it can contribute to both conflict and peace. However, he underscored that religious communities are willing and capable of playing a constructive role in promoting understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Political authorities have gradually acknowledged that religion must be part of the solution rather than just being perceived as a risk factor. Through interreligious cooperation, there has been progress in raising awareness that religious communities can actively contribute to security and social cohesion.

One notable example from Switzerland is the implementation of regular state support for places of worship that require enhanced protection, particularly synagogues, which have faced threats from various extremist groups. Dr. Wipf noted that this initiative represents a step toward recognizing the importance of religious institutions in fostering stability and security.

### Consideration 2: The Role of Interreligious Cooperation

Dr. Wipf stressed the importance of the newly formed Interreligious Council for Peace and Security in Europe. He acknowledged the need for religious representatives to engage beyond their individual faith communities and address broader societal challenges collectively. Security issues are not confined to specific religious groups but are common challenges that require joint efforts.

He emphasized that interreligious collaboration should extend beyond high-level discussions among experts and religious leaders. There is a pressing need to reach grassroots communities and build awareness at local places of worship across Europe. Strengthening networks among religious institutions, both nationally and across Europe, will foster mutual learning and better safety practices.

Additionally, Dr. Wipf reflected on the significance of site visits to various places of worship, such as the recent initiative in Rome. He encouraged further similar engagements in other European cities to deepen mutual understanding and cooperation.

Conclusion

Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf’s address underscored the necessity of inclusive and cooperative approaches in addressing security concerns in Europe. He called for political and religious authorities to recognize religion as a crucial factor in both societal cohesion and security policy. The new Interreligious Council for Peace and Security holds significant potential in fostering dialogue and collaboration across religious traditions and broader society. By integrating grassroots engagement and strengthening interfaith networks, religious communities can play a transformative role in promoting peace, security, and social harmony in Europe.

## Dr. Massimo Abdallah Cozzolino Speech

Introduction

Dr. Massimo Abdallah Cozzolino, a respected academic and interfaith leader, shared his insights on the role of interreligious cooperation in security matters. With a background in multiculturalism, international relations, and counter-radicalization, Dr. Cozzolino has been actively involved in projects addressing security challenges for religious spaces in Europe. His address focused on the SPIRIT project, its objectives, and the broader implications of interfaith dialogue in security frameworks.

### The SPIRIT Project

Dr. Cozzolino introduced the SPIRIT project (Synergies to Protect Places of Worship and Religious Gatherings), an EU-funded initiative under the Internal Security Fund. Launched in 2023 and set to conclude in April 2024, this project builds on previous initiatives such as Shield and Shrine, focusing on enhancing security measures for religious sites across Europe.

A distinguishing feature of SPIRIT is its emphasis on security, supported by multiple governmental and academic institutions. It brings together ministries of interior, police agencies from Greece, Germany, Spain, and Belgium, and religious representatives from the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. Additionally, research centers and universities contribute technological expertise to develop innovative security tools.

### Technological Innovations in Security

One of the primary achievements of the SPIRIT project has been the development of an advanced security tool integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT). The IoT framework enables connected networks of physical devices equipped with sensors, software, and data-sharing capabilities to enhance real-time security measures.

A key component of this initiative is a communication platform designed to facilitate information exchange among religious communities and public authorities. Unlike publicly available systems, this tool is specifically designed for use within religious networks, enhancing internal security coordination and response mechanisms. In Italy, a similar tool developed by the National Police allows citizens to anonymously report suspicious activities, demonstrating the potential effectiveness of such measures.

### Community Awareness and Training

Dr. Cozzolino highlighted the varying levels of security awareness among different religious communities. While the Jewish community has established robust security protocols, Christian and Muslim communities often lack the same level of preparedness. To address this, the SPIRIT project emphasizes training initiatives aimed at improving anticipation, prevention, protection, and response capabilities.

The project promotes a holistic security framework that fosters multi-level communication between public authorities, religious leaders, and local communities. This approach aligns with the “REACT” model—Report, Engage, Assess, Communicate, and Train—which is crucial for establishing standardized security procedures across different faith groups.

### The Role of Interfaith Cooperation

Dr. Cozzolino underscored the importance of interfaith dialogue in security-related matters. While theological discussions remain significant, practical cooperation among religious groups, law enforcement agencies, and municipal authorities is essential for addressing contemporary threats. Notably, he pointed out that in some Muslim-majority communities in Southern Europe, there is a mistrust of law enforcement due to historical associations with authoritarian rule. Bridging this gap requires proactive engagement between religious communities and democratic institutions to foster mutual trust and cooperation.

### Training and Practical Exercises

As part of the SPIRIT project, multiple training exercises have been conducted in Rome, Greece, Spain, and Belgium. These exercises focus on developing response protocols for potential security threats, reinforcing the need for collaboration among religious leaders, public authorities, and law enforcement agencies. The goal is to ensure that religious communities are not only aware of security challenges but also equipped with the necessary tools and strategies to respond effectively.

### Future Directions and Ethical Considerations

Looking ahead, Dr. Cozzolino emphasized the need for continued investment in security tools and training while maintaining the sacred and welcoming nature of places of worship. He highlighted ongoing efforts to refine digital security tools that allow religious communities to report suspicious activities while preserving ethical considerations related to religious spaces.

## Conclusion

Dr. Massimo Abdallah Cozzolino’s address reaffirmed the critical role of interfaith cooperation in enhancing security for places of worship. The SPIRIT project represents a significant step forward in integrating technology, training, and dialogue to address security threats in a holistic manner. By fostering trust among religious communities and public institutions, these efforts contribute to a more secure and cohesive European society.

## Speeches by Pilar Arnáez and Fr. Aitor de la Morena

The discussions highlighted the importance of religious spaces as centers for dialogue, social cohesion, and security.

### ****Key Points from Pilar Arnáez****

Pilar Arnáez opened her speech by acknowledging the privilege of representing the Proton Project and expressed appreciation for Fr. Aitor’s contributions. She outlined the project's foundational principles, emphasizing the need to protect places of worship amid increasing threats of violence. The project is funded by the Internal Security Fund and aims to bridge differences between security cultures across Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

The Proton Project approaches security holistically, incorporating physical, mental, and social well-being. It strengthens collaboration between faith organizations and local authorities while fostering mutual trust. Through this initiative, places of worship are encouraged to expand their roles beyond religious purposes to become hubs for education, dialogue, and cultural exchange.

Pilar highlighted several examples of interfaith collaboration, including:

* A unique event in Madrid where Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities celebrated religious traditions together.
* A security conference in Brussels focusing on protecting places of worship.
* Interfaith initiatives such as concerts and cultural events in Barcelona aimed at fostering unity and inclusivity.
* A video project showcasing an Islamic place of worship as a sanctuary of peace and mutual respect.

She emphasized that sustained interfaith dialogue and cooperation could transform religious sites into sustainable centers of inclusion. The Interfaith Council for Peace and Security was introduced as a key initiative aimed at uniting diverse religious traditions in addressing security challenges.

### ****Key Points from Fr. Aitor de la Morena****

Fr. Aitor de la Morena followed by expressing modesty about his role in the project, emphasizing that the true focus should be on Pilar Arnáez’s contributions. He reflected on his surprise at being invited to collaborate with the Arcoforum organization and participate in the advisory board.

He highlighted the significance of having a formal Roman Catholic presence in the project, given the widespread Catholic demographic across Europe. Despite the small size of his office, the experience of being part of a broader interfaith network was invaluable. Fr. Aitor emphasized the effectiveness of collaborative efforts in raising awareness about the importance of protecting places of worship and strengthening interfaith relations.

He shared personal insights on the necessity of protecting places of worship due to the increasing number of attacks. He also acknowledged the broader implications for religious freedom and expressed his commitment to sharing the project’s learnings with the Catholic community in Madrid and beyond.

Fr. Aitor concluded by discussing his participation in the Interfaith Council, emphasizing the need for religious leaders to engage with external communities rather than remain isolated. He recounted how his bishop supported his involvement, recognizing the value of interfaith collaboration in fostering mutual understanding and security.

## ****Conclusion****

The speeches by Pilar Arnáez and Fr. Aitor de la Morena underscored the critical role of interfaith dialogue in safeguarding places of worship and promoting social cohesion. The Protone Project exemplifies how religious spaces can transcend their traditional roles to become platforms for intercultural and interfaith collaboration. The establishment of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Security marks a significant step toward ensuring the continuity of these efforts, emphasizing the need for policymakers, communities, and individuals to engage in securing and reimagining sacred spaces in inclusive and sustainable ways.

1. **Audience:**

82 people participated in the conference, either in person or online.

1. 39 registered online
2. 5 did not register online but signed in on paper
3. Maximum of 17 views on Zoom
4. Maximum of 15 views on YouTube
5. Approx. 6 who showed up directly, and weren't tracked

However, some of these counts (like Zoom and YouTube) could be single participants or multiple people joining from one device. For simplicity, we'll assume each view represents one participant.

1. **Impact:**

The symposium had a significant impact with a total of 82 participants across various channels: 39 registered online, 5 signed in on paper, 17 on Zoom, 15 on YouTube, and approximately 6 walk-ins. This diverse attendance reflects a strong interest in the event. The Zoom and YouTube views indicate engagement across both live and passive formats, suggesting a broad reach. The mix of online and in-person formats also facilitated networking and knowledge sharing. The true impact could be measured through post-event feedback, which would help assess learning outcomes, networking opportunities, and overall satisfaction.

1. **Efficiency:**

Given the tight timeline between the third interfaith symposium (November 20, 2024) and the final conference (January 29, 2025), efficient time management was essential. The planning process began immediately after the November symposium, with efforts intensifying in early December once the evaluation report was completed. Despite the holiday season slowing down responses—especially from speakers—organizers worked strategically to keep the process moving forward.

Key time-sensitive challenges included:

* Venue Selection: Finding an accessible location without strict ID requirements while ensuring a prestigious and practical setting.
* Speaker Confirmations: The Christmas and New Year holidays delayed responses, requiring continuous follow-ups to finalize the program.
* Catering and Logistics: Ensuring quality catering within budget constraints and coordinating participant needs efficiently.

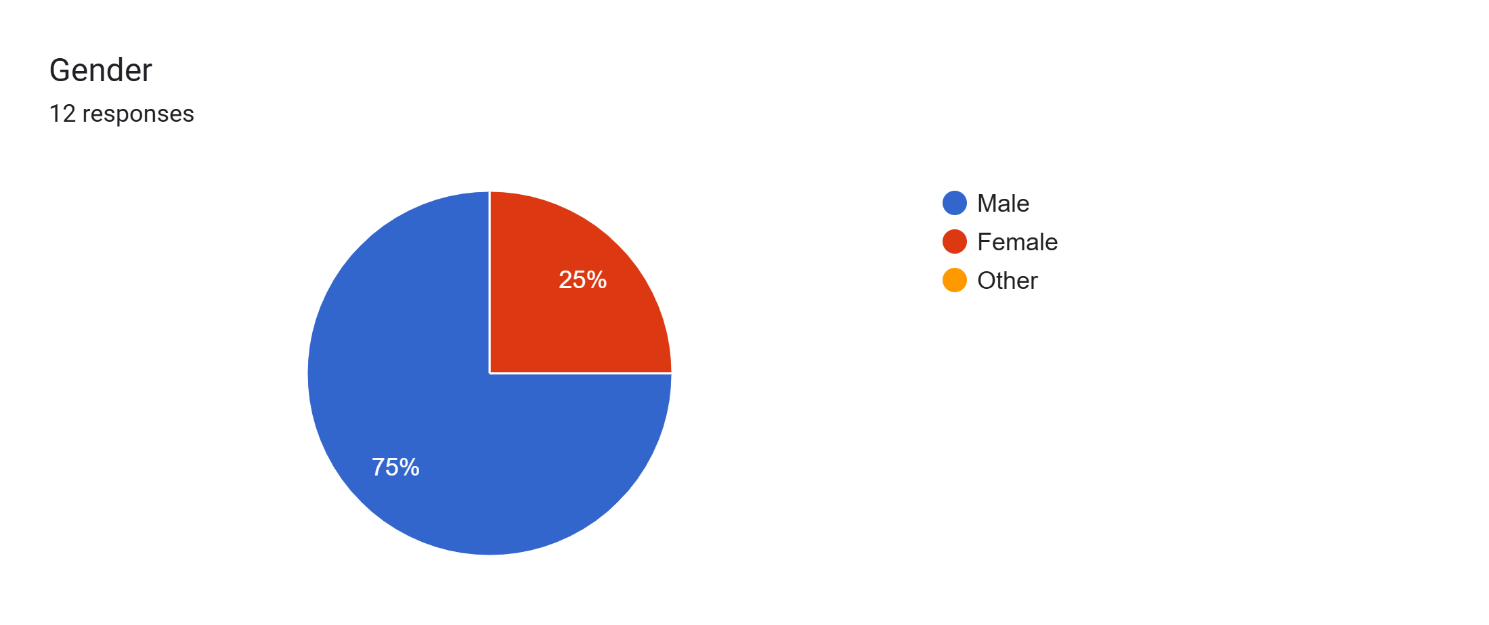
Despite these constraints, the event was successfully executed within the given timeframe, demonstrating the team's ability to adapt, prioritize, and maintain focus under tight deadlines.

Strategic in-person negotiations and careful selection of services allowed the conference to remain within budget while ensuring high-quality outcomes. The team efficiently managed costs related to catering, venue rental, and logistics, successfully securing study tour tickets—an often unpredictable expense—without exceeding financial limits.

1. **Feedback and Lessons Learnt:**

#### Overview of Responses

A total of 12 participants provided feedback, consisting of 3 females and 9 males. All respondents were in the 26+ age category.



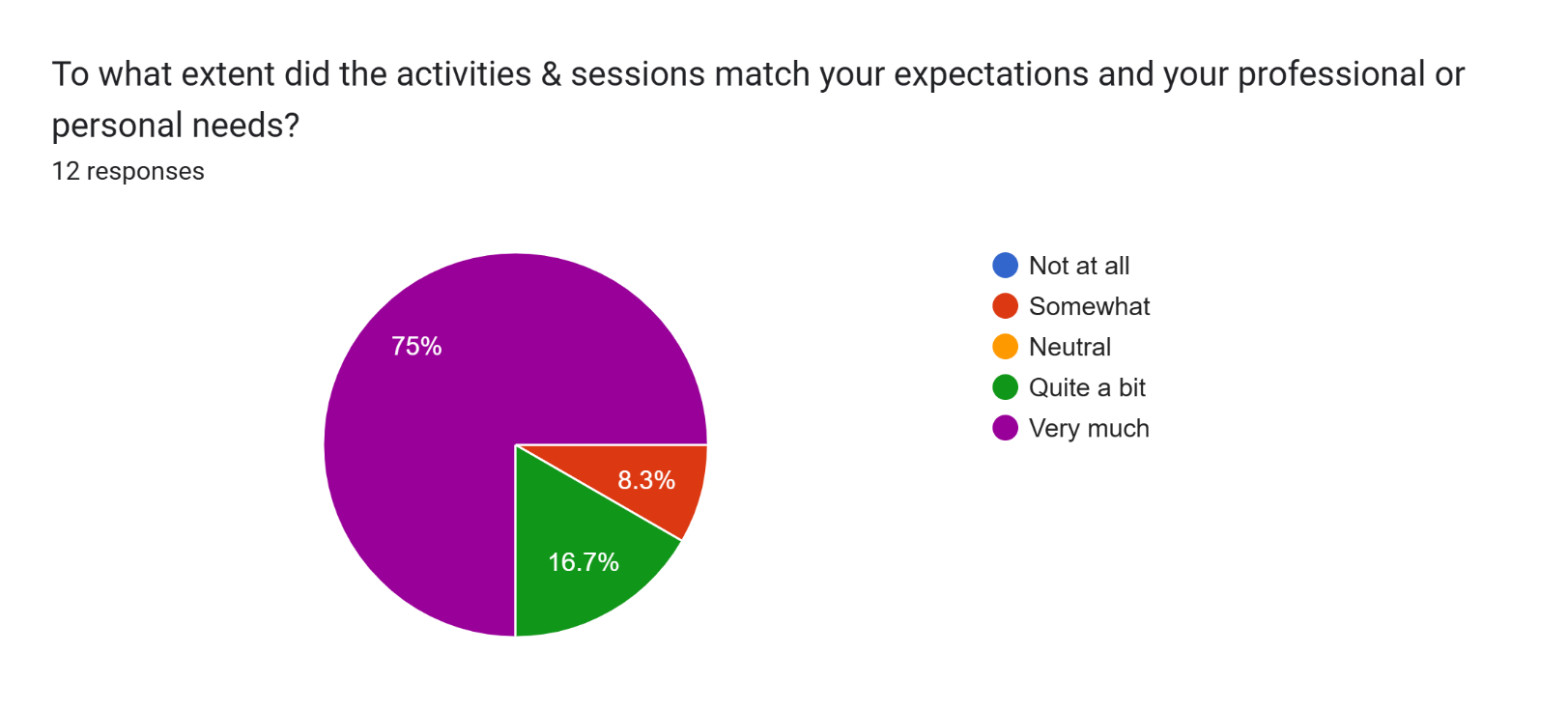
#### Relevance & Effectiveness

* 9 respondents found the conference very relevant.
* 2 found it quite a bit relevant.
* 1 found it somewhat relevant.



1. **Alignment with Expectations and Needs:**

* 9 respondents stated the sessions met their expectations very much.
* 2 said quite a bit.
* 1 said somewhat.



1. **Contribution to Objectives (Protection of Worship Places & Interfaith Collaboration):**

* 6 agreed.
* 3 strongly agreed.
* 2 were neutral.
* 1 strongly disagreed.

1. **Faith Group Representation Observed:**

* 7 respondents noted 3-5 faith groups.
* 3 observed 6 or more faith groups.
* 2 noted 1-2 faith groups.

1. **Inclusivity of Discussions and Activities:**

* 9 found them very inclusive.
* 2 found them somewhat inclusive.
* 1 remained neutral.

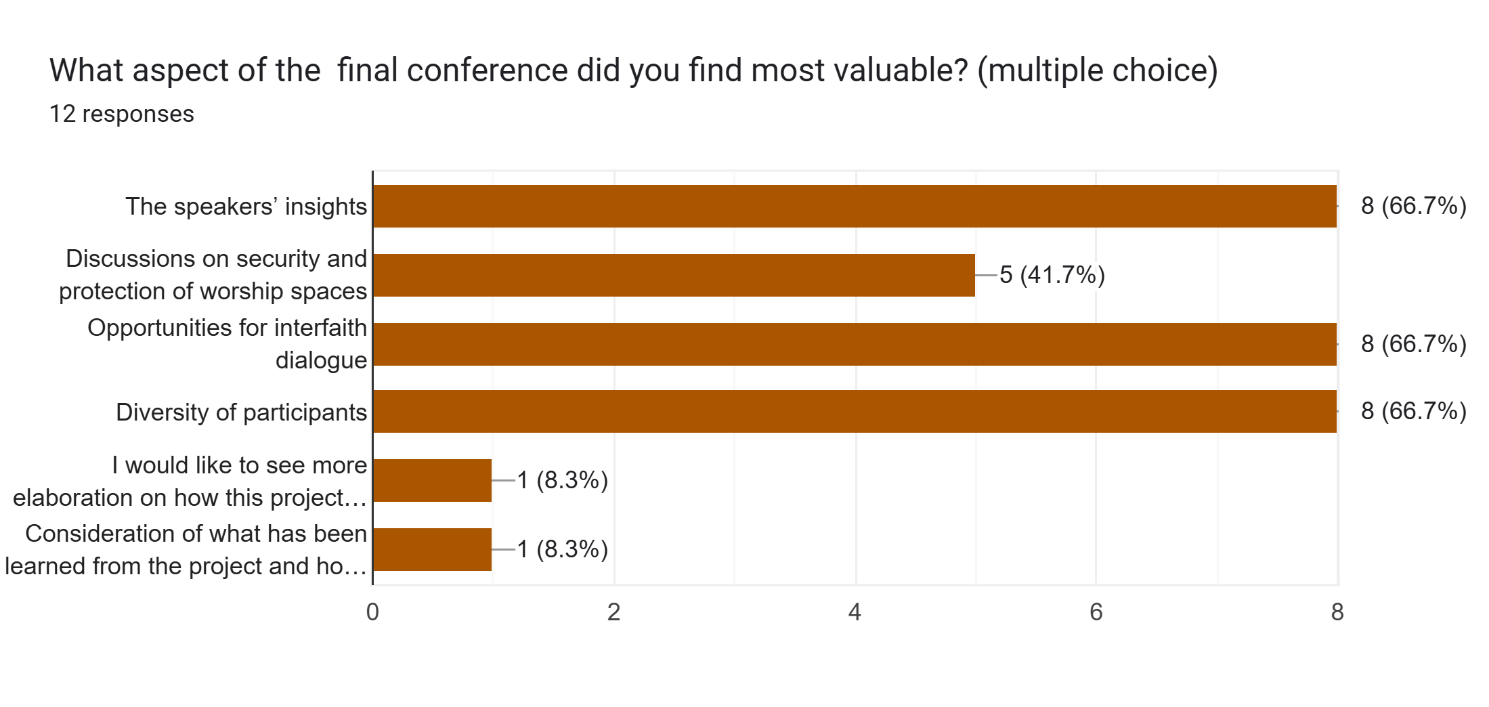
#### Event Organization & Time Management (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent):

* 5 stars – 9 responses.
* 4 stars – 3 responses.
* Average rating: 4.75.

#### h. Most Valuable Aspects of the Conference

(Multiple selections were allowed)

* Speakers’ insights – 8
* Discussions on security & protection of worship spaces – 5
* Opportunities for interfaith dialogue – 8
* Diversity of participants – 8
* Consideration of learnings & future steps – 1
* Desire for more elaboration on implementation plans – 1



#### i. Areas for Improvement

* More information needed – 1 response.
* Availability of resources for full participation, including an in-person interfaith council meeting – 1 response.

#### j. Recommendations for Organizers

* 2 responses received:
  + “Thank you!”
  + No specific recommendations.

#### k. Key Takeaways & Suggestions

The conference was highly relevant and successfully met the needs of most participants. Inclusivity and diversity were well-appreciated, contributing to a welcoming and engaging environment. The event’s strong organization and effective time management played a significant role in the positive experience of attendees. While overall feedback was highly favorable, a few participants expressed interest in receiving more information on project implementation and resource allocation for future participation. No major concerns were raised, highlighting the success of the event.

1. **Conclusion:**

The *Protone Project Final Conference*, **Beyond Protection: Imagining the Places of Worship in Europe**, marked a significant milestone in the discourse on religious spaces and their evolving roles in contemporary society. By bringing together scholars, policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society representatives, the event fostered a multidisciplinary approach to understanding places of worship - not just as sites of religious practice but as vital cultural, social, and political hubs.

Throughout the conference, key themes emerged:

* The necessity of *rethinking security measures* for places of worship beyond traditional frameworks, ensuring protection without compromising openness.
* The *sociological and ethnographic dimensions* of religious spaces, emphasizing their role in fostering identity, social cohesion, and interfaith dialogue.
* The importance of *legal recognition and equitable policies* to support minority religious communities in securing dignified worship spaces.
* The *transnational implications* of religious freedom, highlighting the need for cross-border cooperation in safeguarding sacred spaces.
* The power of *intercultural and interfaith collaboration* in building trust, fostering mutual understanding, and enhancing security through dialogue rather than division.

The pre-conference study tour and the post-conference visit to the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue reinforced the practical applications of these discussions. The Dicastery’s expressed support for the continuation of the Protone Project and its recognition of interfaith efforts to protect minority places of worship underscore the real-world significance of these initiatives. Additionally, the interreligious pilgrimage to the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica and the inclusion of the Friday Prayer for Muslim participants symbolized the spirit of inclusivity and mutual respect that defined the entire event.

**Looking Ahead**

The conference was not just an academic gathering but a call to action. The findings, insights, and recommendations shared throughout the sessions provide a foundation for future research, policy development, and community-driven initiatives. As Europe continues to navigate challenges related to security, integration, and religious diversity, the Protone Project stands as a testament to the potential of collaborative efforts in shaping a future where religious spaces are not only protected but also reimagined as centers of unity, dialogue, and peace.



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