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EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine



**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE
EUROPEAN BUDDHIST UNION**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 04.** Stefano's Editorial:
Imagining the Future
- 08.** Emilia's Editorial:
Celebrating 50 Years of the European Buddhist Union
- 10.** Buddhism 2075:
An Evolving Identity for a Future That Begins Now
- 16.** EBU at UNDV
2025 · Vietnam
- 20.** The Middle Way in Modern Times:
Rethinking European Buddhism
- 24.** Responses to the
framing questions
- 30.** 50 Years of the European Buddhist Union:
A Milestone in Vienna
- 32.** A history of Buddhist voices
articulated by Europeans
- 38.** News form the EBU:
What has EBU been doing lately?

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Imagining the Future



By Stefano Davide Bettera



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2025 it's a special year for the European Buddhist Union (EBU):

it marks the 50th anniversary of our union. This anniversary invites us to reflect on the current state of Buddhism and on future prospects and challenges, both in the short and long term. The central question, therefore, is: what kind of Buddhism can we imagine for the future? Is it already possible to identify the characteristics of what might emerge in the coming decades? In short, can we truly begin to speak of a Western Buddhism capable of addressing society's most urgent issues and offering interpretative keys to its complexity?

Over the past fifty years, Buddhism has established a solid presence in Europe, evolving into a rich and diverse phenomenon. It encompasses various branches and interconnections of the different Asian Buddhist traditions. However, Buddhism's unique

capacity to transcend traditional categories—whether religion, philosophy, practice, or way of life—offers Europe something even deeper: a sensitivity, an understanding, and an existential stance that resonates with a wide spectrum of individuals. This includes not only practitioners, but also intellectuals, researchers, activists, and sympathizers whose worldviews have been profoundly influenced by Buddhist teachings.

From this complex landscape, we want to begin imagining what European Buddhism might look like fifty years from now. For this reason, the EBU, in collaboration with the UBI Study Center, has organized a day of reflection and dialogue entitled ***Buddhism 2075: Shaping the Identity of European Buddhism***. The conference was held in Vienna on April 25, on the occasion of the annual general assembly, which, as every year, gathers members from all over Europe. The conference takes a dynamic format, favoring debate over monologues and encouraging interaction between speakers and the audience. ►

► This exploration delves into the boundaries of an evolving European Buddhist identity in an era of profound cultural, technological, social, and political transformations. The first and perhaps most compelling question we face is: does a distinctly European (or Western) form of Buddhism already exist? Are we witnessing a process of cultural adaptation in Europe similar to how Buddhism historically integrated into local cultures throughout Asia? Where are we in this process, and what changes when the cultural backdrop is modern, rooted in secularism and scientific thought? These questions naturally lead us to explore the relationship between Buddhism and science, beyond superficial reconciliations. This is not only an academic debate, but also concerns the way these ideas shape the authentic inner lives of practitioners. How closely should contemporary Buddhism remain tied to its traditional roots? And how much should it embrace its intrinsic capacity for renewal—its anti-dogmatic, critical, and non-metaphysical spirit?

This also raises questions about Buddhism's original monastic vocation, which has remained central but has never been its only historical expression. While monasticism has been a strong component, Buddhism has also flourished among lay practitioners and in a variety of cultural contexts. Does European Buddhism still need monasteries, or should it evolve into new forms that reflect the needs of contemporary practitioners?

Moreover, how should the Dharma address the pressing social issues facing democratic Europe, where polarized debates divide liberal and conservative ideologies? Topics such as gender equality, racism, social inclusion, and bioethics are just some of the many issues dominating today's public discourse. Other critical areas include environmental ethics, freedom of expression, and the challenges of migration. These are complex questions with significant identity and political implications. Should European Buddhists take a stance on these matters, or should Buddhism remain outside such debates to avoid being shaped by the biases of contemporary society?

And finally, the most important and challenging question: is it possible to find common ground, a shared foundation among the various forms of Buddhism that have taken root in Europe? These different forms already coexist in the same cities and within national and transnational Buddhist unions. But can they not only coexist, but also foster a deeper sense of unity and collaboration within these shared spaces? This invites us to consider the still-untapped potential of a truly unified Buddhist community. Perhaps this is precisely where we should begin: laying the foundations for a spiritual and ethical perspective capable of contributing to the course of the new millennium. 🧘

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backdrop is modern, rooted in secularism and scientific thought?**

”



Stefano Davide Bettera
European Buddhist Union
President



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Editorial

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN BUDDHIST UNION

This winter issue is dedicated to a very special milestone: the 50th anniversary of the European Buddhist Union. What better way to mark this moment than by revisiting the vibrant discussions held during the EBU Conference last spring in Vienna?

The conference not only celebrated the Union's rich history—it also looked ahead. Centered around the theme of memory, renewal, and ethical responsibility, the event raised essential questions for our time:

- How can European Buddhism relate to modernity?
- What does it mean for Buddhism in Europe to be “engaged”?
- Is a truly European Sangha possible?

You'll find reflections and insights from these discussions throughout this issue.

In her article *The Middle Way in Modern Times: Rethinking European Buddhism* (page 20), Iona Spataru—currently Head of the Austrian Buddhist Youth—offers a fresh perspective on how Buddhism is lived and shaped in Europe today.

Most of us weren't there when the EBU was founded in 1975—but we are certainly living its legacy. We're witnessing the fruits of seeds planted half a century ago. The founding vision was bold: to unite Buddhist organizations across Europe, foster spiritual friendship, promote social action grounded in Buddhist values, and represent Buddhism in dialogue with European institutions. These aims remain alive and vital today.

And here's a lovely detail that made me smile: those early EBU pioneers even dreamed of creating a European Buddhist Magazine—the very one you now hold in your hands.

Read more about this and other fascinating facts from our history in Michael Vermeulens article “A history of Buddhist voices articulated by Europeans”.

UNDV stands for United Nations Day of Vesak. In her article “EBU at UND” Charlotta Segre takes us on a trip to Vietnam and introduces the UNDV 2025 celebrations, activities and academic sessions that were held in Vietnam last spring.

And as usual we introduce the recent topics on EBU's activities in our regular column “What has EBU been doing lately”?

Europe is richly diverse, and so is the EBU. It serves as a bridge between cultures, languages, and people. This is what we're celebrating: connection, community, and the mutual path we walk together.

We don't only celebrate the past—we honor the living tradition that continues to unfold. What is still to come? Has a distinctly European form of Buddhism already taken shape?

Buddhism in Europe breathes and evolves with every step, staying true to the Buddha's timeless wisdom—wisdom that remains as relevant today as ever.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We hope this winter issue brings warmth, reflection, and inspiration to your days.

In gratitude,

Emilia Amala

Editor, European Buddhist Magazine



Emilia Amalā Raunio is a Dharma student from Helsinki, Finland. As a background in food science her interest is to heal the world together with our everyday actions. Emilia is a former council member of EBU and also one of the hosts in EBU's European Buddha Podcast. She enjoys walks in the forest, cooking plant based, swimming in all kinds of waters and there is always a place for a cup of green tea.

Buddhism 2075: An Evolving Identity for a Future That Begins Now

By Chiara Mascarello and Francesco Tormen

25

75

The conference marking the 50th anniversary of the European Buddhist Union set the course for European Buddhism between memory, renewal, and ethical responsibility.

Vienna, April 25, 2025

Fifty years after its foundation, the European Buddhist Union celebrated its anniversary with a forward-looking perspective. The conference, titled *Buddhism 2075: Shaping the Identity of European Buddhism*, held at the Public Educational Centre in Vienna, turned out to be a bold, multidimensional reflection on the future of Buddhism in Europe.

Organized in collaboration with the Study Center of the Italian Buddhist Union, which provided scientific

and planning support, and with the Austrian Buddhist Union, the generous host of the initiative, the conference brought together some of the most significant voices in contemporary Buddhism to explore what shape it might take in the next fifty years on European soil.

The day revolved around three essential questions: three thematic sessions, three spaces for critical dialogue, all in an atmosphere of lively interaction with the audience.

An International Panel for a Transforming Identity

The proceedings were led by five key figures in the international Buddhist landscape:

- **Stephen Batchelor**, British writer, known for his secular and philosophical reinterpretation of the Dharma;
- **Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā**, Italian nun and scholar, expert in ancient texts and director of the Āgama Research Group;
- **Peter D. Hershock**, philosopher, director of the Humane AI program at the East-West Center (Honolulu, Hawaii), engaged in dialogue between Buddhism and technology;
- **Gábor Karsai**, philosopher, rector of the Dharma Gate Buddhist College in Budapest and Managing Director of Mind & Life Europe;
- **Ioana Spataru**, young activist and leader of the Buddhist Youth of the Austrian Buddhist Union, with a background in human rights and anthropology.

The composition of the panel—transgenerational, intercultural, and interdisciplinary—was itself an example of the plurality and creative tensions that shape Buddhism in Europe today.

SESSION II

How Can European Buddhism Relate to Modernity?

The first topic addressed a central question: can Buddhism, born in a premodern and Asian context, truly take root in the heart of a secularized, science-based European society without betraying its nature?

European Buddhism is still in its formative stage. While in Asian contexts the cultural integration of the Dharma took centuries, in Europe it has been only fifty years. The idea that Buddhism must “purge” itself of all metaphysics in order to adapt to contemporary thinking was seen as inadequate: concepts such as karma and rebirth, often regarded as cultural obstacles, remain for many practitioners valuable tools for growth and reflection—particularly among younger generations.

Much attention was given to dialogue with science. Although science shares with Buddhism an experimental approach that intrigues many young people, it struggles to address consciousness as an object of study. This, the speakers suggested, offers Buddhism an opportunity to provide complementary knowledge—not in opposition but in dialogue with science—highlighting and bridging its gaps through phenomenological and contemplative tools rooted in lived experience. Such a dialogue requires a creative circulation of ideas, where each discipline productively challenges the other.

In line with postmodernism, Buddhism conveys the view that human identities are continuously “constructed.” Yet the conversation revealed



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the need for a shift: Buddhist practitioners must move beyond the psychological-individualist concept of identity, and beyond reducing Dharma practice to a mere “emotional connection” with the Buddha’s teaching. Instead, they should work toward conscious, social, and collective forms of identity, developing a more radical and responsible sense of agency.

What Buddhism can offer young people is, above all, an encouragement to experience the mystery of their lives, opening to a sense of wonder. By addressing the search for meaning, it can provide tools to cultivate resilience—an essential engine for growth, though rarely taught in our school systems. This reflection led to a call to more experienced Buddhists: embodied Dharma practice offers others both an example and a doorway into the Buddhist perspective, perhaps the only way it can truly take root in society. ►



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“The challenge is to reinterpret the issues of our time through the wise lens of Dharma”

SESSION III

How Can European Buddhism Be “Engaged”?

If the first session addressed the philosophical identity of European Buddhism, the second focused on its ethical dimension: can Buddhism be an active force in society without betraying its contemplative vocation?

The debate on “engaged Buddhism,” a concept coined in the 20th century, sparked a lively and participatory discussion. Many European practitioners, especially young ones, resonate with it, but ambiguities remain. The speakers recalled that, historically, Buddhism has always been embedded in the world, and the idea of a “non-engaged Buddhism” is a recent construct. Practice and action have always strengthened one another rather than standing in opposition.

Yet, the need was stressed to distinguish between conscious engagement and ideological militancy, avoiding the political or identity-based use of the Dharma, which would contradict its founding principles: interdependence, compassion, non-

violence. Buddhism can provide tools to critically interpret reality, but it does not hand out ready-made answers. The challenge is to reinterpret the issues of our time through the wise lens of Dharma.

Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā pointed out that European Buddhism often remains confined to privileged contexts, hardly representative of marginalized groups. The absence of migrants or economically disadvantaged people in Buddhist centers raises crucial questions: who is excluded, and why?

Ioana Spataru, the young Buddhist speaker, responded forcefully: spiritual practice is inseparable from commitment to social justice, climate, and relationships. Spirituality is the root for acting in society with clarity and compassion. The discussion outlined a vision of engaged Buddhism as mindful action—not reactive—capable of facing complexity without succumbing to polarization or political reductionism. ►

SESSION IIII

Is a European Sangha Possible?

The third and final session of the conference addressed a profound question: in a landscape shaped by religious pluralism, individualism, and constant mobility, is it realistic to imagine the formation of a European sangha?

Today, sangha is understood as a complex network of relationships between monastics and lay practitioners united in spiritual pursuit inspired by the Dharma. It was discussed as a relational practice, lived in mutual daily support. Yet in Europe, this fabric appears fragmented: different traditions—Zen, Theravāda, Tibetan, etc.—often coexist in the same cities but communicate little with one another. Moreover, Asian migrant-founded communities and European convert communities rarely interact.

The precarious condition of monastic communities was also highlighted: often isolated and lacking adequate social and economic support. In a context dominated by the logic of productivity, monastic survival seems fragile. Rebuilding the traditional alliance between monastics and laypeople, in new and contextualized ways, was identified as a crucial call for the future of European Buddhism.

While a fully unified sangha has never existed in Asia either, today there is a felt need to imagine a plural, interconnected community capable of fostering belonging that transcends ritual or doctrinal differences. As Gábor Karsai noted, what unites practitioners is a shared atmosphere of stillness, kindness, and presence, seeking deeper cohesion. The hope is for new spaces of encounter between traditions: places to meet, share experiences, and build common projects. ►



► An Identity to Imagine Together

The Buddhism 2075 conference revealed European Buddhism as an open construction site. Certainties, language, and habits must be reconsidered within a tradition that is not reduced to rigid loyalty to the past, but lives in its ability to respond to the present and open to the future.

Without the younger generations, European Buddhism has no future. And it became clear that they do not seek Buddhism as a mere technique for individual well-being or a spiritual trend; they ask for coherence, depth, tools to interpret the world. Young people seek spaces where practice is also action, reflection, and the building of collective meaning. And they want to

contribute, bringing their voices, their questions, their wounds. In imagining innovative solutions, Buddhism can become one of the collective intelligences needed to face our times.

The conference showed that dialogue is not just a strategy: it is already a form of practice. For this reason, such events should become regular appointments. And not limited to Europe: the future of Buddhism will be all the richer the more it connects its many voices and multiple horizons. A living network of mindful relationships, where the principle of interdependence is a shared experience.



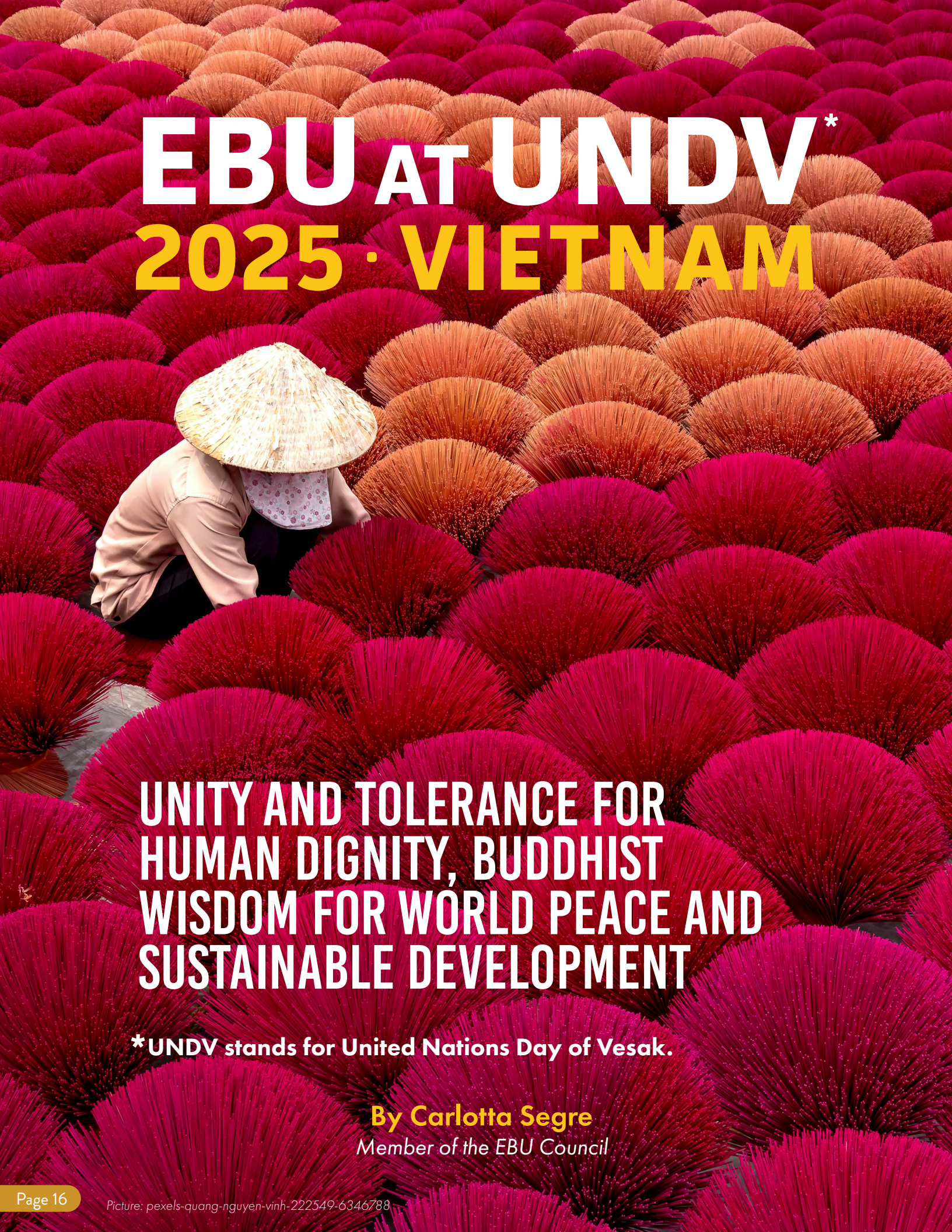
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Prof. Chiara Mascarello

She holds a research grant at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where she also serves as an Adjunct Professor of Tibetan Language, and co-directs the Italian Buddhist Union's Research Center. Additionally, she is among the founders and board members of the Contemplative Studies program at the University of Padua and has lectured in various university programs. After earning her PhD in Philosophy, she advanced her studies in Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan language at Sera Monastic University (India), UMA Institute (USA), and the University of Hamburg. She has worked extensively as a Tibetan translator and regularly conducts translation workshops. Her research focuses on the Indo-Tibetan contemplative tradition, particularly exploring the nature of mind and the practice of mind training, and its relevance to contemporary societies.

Prof. Francesco Tormen

He is an Adjunct Professor of Tibetan Language and Literature at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and serves as the Co-Director of the Italian Buddhist Union's Research Center. He is also one of the founders of the Master's Program in "Contemplative Studies" at the University of Padova and has published various contributions on Madhyamaka philosophy and the contemplative practices of Tibetan Buddhism, focusing on Dream Yoga and Lucid Dreaming. Recently, he has been exploring the transformations Buddhism is undergoing in the digital age, examining its relationship with Posthumanism and Transhumanism. 🧘



EBU AT UNDV^{*} 2025 · VIETNAM

UNITY AND TOLERANCE FOR
HUMAN DIGNITY, BUDDHIST
WISDOM FOR WORLD PEACE AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

^{*}UNDV stands for United Nations Day of Vesak.

By **Carlotta Segre**
Member of the EBU Council



The 2025 Vesak Celebration opening ceremony took place at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City on the 6th May 2025 under the theme: **"Unity and Inclusive for Human Dignity, World Peace and Sustainable Development."**

This year celebration was held on the momentous occasion of the 20th anniversary of Vesak recognition as an international day of observance by the United Nations (UN).

As stated by Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the UN, in his message:

"Buddha teaching of compassion, tolerance and self-service resonate deeply with the values of the United Nations. In an era of global challenge these timeless principles must guide our shared forward. As we honor this sacred occasion, may we be inspired to bridge divides, foster solidarity and work together toward a more peaceful, sustainable and harmonious world".

Vietnam has previously hosted 2008, 2014 and 2019 events; this year was specially meaningful for Vietnam as it took place short after the historical

commemorations of the 50th anniversary of national reunification, a milestone marking the Vietnamese people's full attainment of independence and peace.

The celebrations attracted 2,700 delegates, including 1,300 international delegates, Buddhist scholars and intellectuals from 85 Countries and territories.

On the evening of the 6th May a ceremony of prayer for world peace and people well-being took place at Vietnam Buddhist Academy. The event drew approximately 12,000 participants which 35,000 lanterns lit, creating a radiant atmosphere. The delegates together with a vast assembly of monastic, lay Buddhists and local people, witnessed the incense offering ceremony: more than just a spiritual activity the festival also conveyed a profound message of unity, loving kindness and a call for peace for all humanity.

On 7th May the 2025 Vesak entered its second day of activities - coordinated by the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV) - with messages and speeches from leaders of the International Buddhist Organizations, heads of Buddhism traditions, and esteemed scholars from around the world. ►





► On 7th afternoon academic sessions were conducted addressing urgent global concerns, accordingly to the sub-topics of the event:

- Cultivating inner peace and world peace.
- Forgiveness and mindful: a path to reconciliation.
- Buddhist compassion in action: shared responsibilities for human development.
- Mindfulness and education for a compassionate and sustainable future.
- Fostering unity: collaborative efforts for global harmony.

The wealth of insights of international and national papers and speeches highlighted buddhism's vital role in shaping collective responses to contemporary global challenges.

Alongside, two important relics formed the sacred spiritual core of this's Vesak drawing hundred of thousand of Buddhists from all over to pay homage, venerate and get blessings:

- Buddha's relics - a national treasure of India, generously permitted for temporary transfer from the National Museum, excavated from the ancient site of Nagarjunakonda - enshrined at the Than Tam Temple within the Vietnam Buddhist Academy
- Bodhisatwa Thich Quang Duc's sacred heart relics exposition, placed at the Viet Quoc Tu Monastery. In 1963 the monk vowed to self-immolate in an act of great compassion, his heart remained unburnt, intact and fossilized - later venerated as a sacred relic and regarded as a living embodiment of non-violence resistance and spiritual purity.

The celebration was possible also thanks to thousands passionate volunteers who tirelessly served over the days and convey the spirit of Vesak to international friends. Their enthusiasm, professionalism and hospitality greatly contributed to the success of the event and served as an essential and indispensable force.

The UNDV 2025 was more than a grand event, it brought a global message to the world: true peace stem from collective efforts, transformation of human hearths through ethical living, compassion and wisdom. ►

Carlotta Segre

Member of the EBU Council

In 1995 she met Lama Gangchen Rinpoche and since then she devoted her life to serve Buddhism and my Gurus' aims and activities. Professionally, she has a strong background in international relations, having worked with the United Nations in various capacities until 2012.

Her experience in diplomacy and international relations has given here a deep understanding of the complex challenges facing our global community today.

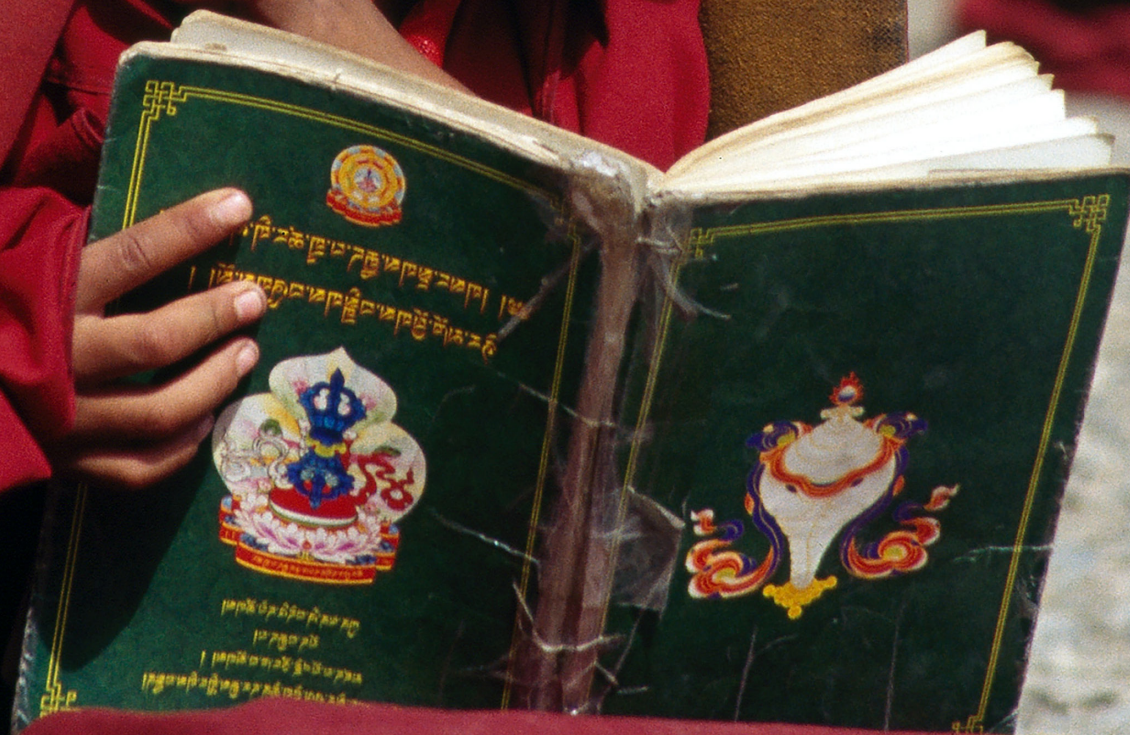
In addition to her work at the UN, she is - since 2018 - a member of the Executive Committee of Kunpen Lama Gangchen, an international Buddhist organization (member of EBU) dedicated to promoting peace, compassion, and interfaith dialogue.

Through her involvement with Kunpen Lama Gangchen, she has had the privilege of engaging with diverse communities of Buddhists from around the world thanks to numerous travels and Buddhist countries visited. 🙏

Pictures in this article have been provided by Carlotta Segre



THE MIDDLE WAY IN MODERN TIMES: RETHINKING EUROPEAN BUDDHISM



By Ioana Spataru

*E*uropean Buddhism, although an intriguing term, does not describe a new phenomenon, but rather a historical process that has taken place multiple times before.

What we are witnessing when we talk about European Buddhism is the adaptation of a spiritual tradition into a new cultural landscape. Buddhism has always done this. It took root in China, Japan, and Tibet by engaging with the local philosophies, religions, schools of thought and ways of life — blending, evolving, and flourishing into something new.

Today, in Europe, the same process is unfolding — but under new conditions. Our societies are shaped by secularism, liberal democracy, science, and technology. These factors influence not only our politics but also our spiritual imaginations. Whether Buddhism should or shouldn't embrace a modern worldview is therefore an obsolete question; it is inevitable when introduced to the European context. Instead, I suggest we should think about what must be protected in this process: Religion is not just about belief. It is a system of rituals, stories, and practices that help people understand their place in the world and face crises like death and sickness. Religion weaves the individual into something larger. Buddhism does this powerfully — not in spite of its metaphysical foundations, but because of them. Karma, rebirth, and samsara are not outdated leftovers from a pre-scientific world. They are ethical structures that give life meaning, offering direction and challenging narrow materialism. They are natural laws that are indestructible through time and space. As valid today as 2500 years ago. We risk making a mistake if we try to make Buddhism more “digestible” for modern audiences. Simplifying it into mindfulness or self-help psychology in order to cater to contemporary minds does not do much but dilute the original teachings.

Young people, in my experience, don't need watered-down spirituality. What they are hungry for is not trendy techniques and flashy events but depth, structure, and genuine tools for transformation and they can be trusted to work with even the most complex metaphysical concepts.

Every time the Buddhist youth meet monks or nuns, they don't hold back their critical questions. Attitudes toward women or LGBTQ+ people, for instance, are being challenged. But these are not metaphysical truths. They are cultural reflections of the societies Buddhism passed through. We should not cling to the outdated social norms of the past. These attitudes can and must evolve.

At the same time, we can acknowledge that some aspects of Buddhism were revolutionary (some might say even radical) from the beginning: The Buddha welcomed women into the monastic order, rejected the caste system, opposed animal sacrifice, and discouraged blind belief. His emphasis on direct experience feels modern to young people. They take refuge in the idea that they don't need to have faith in the Buddha's words, but are invited to test his theories on themselves.

In this way, Buddhism is in its original form already deeply aligned with the scientific spirit many young Europeans long for. It asks questions. It observes. It tests. It's not about believing in a religion that was passed down from their parents, but about practising a way of life that makes sense in *their own* experience.

Modernisation must not mean hollowing out. Karma, rebirth, ritual, and practice remain the very tools that have enabled Buddhism to endure across cultures and centuries. What should change are the parts that no longer serve compassion or liberation. What we must protect is the spiritual architecture that gives people real ground under their feet. ►

► This very ground is crucial when the conversation centres on the question of engagement. Should Buddhism take a stance in Europe's political and social future? At a recent gathering of young Buddhists from across Europe, we debated this question. Politics often revolves around identity, while Buddhism seeks to transcend it.

Can a tradition of non-self engage in identity-driven debates? We concluded that if Buddhism engages, it must do so differently. It must happen with the intention to transcend polarization by promoting the idea of oneness, and the connection to each other, as well as to nature. The engagement must also grow from one's individual spiritual practice, rather than being reduced to another form of activism or instrumentalised for its positive reputation. When rooted in values such as compassion, kindness and right understanding, which are cultivated through determined practice, Buddhist voices can offer something unique in political discourse: A middle way, a third option of nonduality, and a reminder that beyond division, we remain interconnected.

If we place Buddhism into a political landscape, we offer a beacon of hope. We reintroduce a dimension of non-violence into a world so deeply stained by the culture of violence that most people cannot picture a future without it. Yet, at our core, we long for peace and community. The practice of inner transformation alongside outer actions is a way that enables meaningful Buddhist participation in political and

social discourses, and it is one that I hope to see more of in the coming years.

Finally, any reflection on European Buddhism must address the community. Is a *European Sangha* possible? Only if it is inclusive. Too often, the conversation centres around white convert Buddhists, while Asian communities—Vietnamese, Chinese, Tibetan, Thai—remain sidelined, despite decades of presence in Europe. A genuine Sangha must move from coexistence to co-creation. That means building bridges across cultures, inviting second-generation voices, and empowering young people to see themselves as Buddhists and as leaders.

The question is not only whether a European Sangha is possible, but whose Sangha it will be. If the answer is "all of ours," then our work must go beyond meditation halls and temples into how we share space, authority, and belonging with each other. European Buddhism will inevitably adapt.

The challenge is ensuring that modernization does not mean dilution, that engagement does not mean partisanship, and that community does not mean exclusion. What we must protect is the depth that grounds us. What we must cultivate is the courage to engage without losing our center. And what we must imagine is a Sangha that reflects not part of Europe, but all of it. Because what many young people—and perhaps all of us—seek is not just a trend or technique, but a living tradition that can meet us where we are, and help us walk further together. 🧘

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**IF WE PLACE BUDDHISM
INTO A POLITICAL
LANDSCAPE, WE OFFER
A BEACON OF HOPE**

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Ioana Spataru is a Council of Europe certified Human Rights Educator and Non-Formal Education Trainer, as well as an ICF-certified systemic Life - and Business Coach. She is currently the Head of the Austrian Buddhist Youth.



RESPONSES TO THE FRAMING QUESTIONS



By Peter D. Hershock

1 Session

Should European Buddhism Embrace the Modern Worldview?

Ultimately, Buddhism has no self-nature. “Buddhism” refers to a family of traditions that have evolved over the past 2,600 years to become as distinctive as the landscapes and cuisines of the places that they’ve taken root. So, it should be expected that distinctively European traditions of Buddhism would emerge over time. And, as in the past, this will likely involve compassionately wise adaptation: a process of working *with* the tensions among traditional and contemporary institutions, ideals, and realities. Just as the body of a guitar only comes to musical life when the tensions of its strings have been gotten right, European Buddhism will only come to life through getting the tensions right between Buddhist thought and practice and European worldviews and ways of life.

Here, I would focus on the tension between Buddhist cosmology and metaphysics and modern science.

Buddhism and science are both rooted in seeking explanations for how things come to be the way they do. The “holy grail” of modern Western science has been discovering the immutable laws of nature to be able to predict the outcome of everything that will follow from any given set of initial conditions. But for Buddhists, the point of this search is to open prospects for *becoming otherwise*—prospects for freeing ourselves from all forms of compelled or compulsive presence.

And as the Buddha made clear in describing himself as a *kammavadin*, that means becoming “skilled in karma”: skilled in seeing and working with the truth/reality that consistently enacted patterns of values and intentions result in consonant patterns of experienced relational outcomes and opportunities. It is our nondeterministic, karmic capacity for changing our values and intentions and how we enact them that makes liberation possible. In addition to being the result of our past intentions and actions, every moment is also an improvisational opportunity.

Modern science has afforded humanity incredible powers to predict and shape the *observable* universe. But for all its explanatory power, modern science has yet to offer any convincing account of consciousness or the presence of an *observing* universe.

The presumption of most scientists is that the mind will prove to be a product of the body and that neural activity will prove to be the cause of consciousness. As the philosopher Daniel Dennett scathingly summarizes, it will turn out that: “An impersonal, unreflective, robotic, mindless little scrap of molecular machinery is the ultimate basis of all the agency, and hence meaning, and hence consciousness, in the universe.” This comes as close as any statement could to counting as Buddhist heresy—a denial of karma and of the ultimate reality of enlightened presence and the bodhisattva ideal, so wonderfully described in the Vimalakīrti Sutra, of realizing buddha-realms in which all things do the liberating work of enlightenment.

Western science has been very good at exploring the causal dynamics of *matter*. Buddhism has excelled at discerning *what matters* causally for realizing more liberating relational dynamics. One of the defining characteristics of a 21st century European Buddhism should be revealing the liabilities of reductive materialism and helping scientists to theorize consciousness and evolution in pragmatically effective and ethically responsible ways, creatively righting the tension between matter and what matters, and expanding the “light cones” of human care. ►

Should European Buddhism Be “Engaged”?

2 Session

In the face of these risks, many people believe that what matters most is ensuring human survival. That's understandable. According to Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, the value of survival is absolute. Buddhism suggests otherwise. What matters most is *not* mere survival. What *matters most* is realizing more liberating relational dynamics and patterns of interdependence: perfecting our sentient presence.

That is not something anyone can do alone. Neither wisdom nor compassion can be cultivated or embodied in isolation. As Soto Zen Master Dōgen put it: “That which is *not* studying together is self; that which is studying together is all Buddhas.” As described by Muso Soseki, the ideal is to be able both to “practice in the midst of worldly activities” and to “perform worldly activities in the midst of practice.” It is as pointless to try realizing our Buddha-nature in isolation as it is to try “making rice by boiling sand.”

Ultimately, however, there can't be any fixed prescription for what each of us can and should do. As Rinzai Zen master Ikkyū observed: “what you can do depends on your situation” while “your situation depends on what you can do.” Gender inequality, racism, institutionalized injustice, poverty, and the many forms of structural violence that spur mass migration are all causes of suffering. Compassion insists on doing something about them. The knowledge and wisdom required may still elude us. But perhaps gathering that knowledge and generating that wisdom could be the collaborative labor that brings European Buddhism into clear relational focus. ►

► If we take the teaching of interdependence seriously, disengagement is not a Buddhist option. *All of us* are ultimately implicated to some non-trivial degree in the suffering of *any of us*.

Yet, if the aim of Buddhism is to understand, alleviate, and eventually eliminate the causes and conditions of conflict and suffering, and if those causes and conditions are impermanent and both historically and culturally conditioned, then there can't be a single answer to what Buddhist engagement means.

Our births in this world realm at this point in history is proof of our shared karma to be present at an evolutionary juncture when humanity is being confronted with a wide range of anthropogenic existential risks. Climate change is, perhaps, the most widely recognized of these. But bioengineering is increasing risks of pandemics of even greater impact than Covid-19. Artificial general intelligence or superintelligence could easily threaten human futures. And the digital attention economy is already placing at risk our capacities for cultivating true freedom-of-attention, without which there can be no freedom-of-intention, and without which all other freedoms become either impossible or illusory.

Is a European Sangha Possible?

► One of the ideals of Buddhist practice—presented in the very early Sutta Nipāta—has been that of the solitary recluse who leaves family, friends, and the aims of mundane society to “live alone like a rhinoceros” or like “a bull elephant who has abandoned his herd.” This valorization of solitary practice is significantly tempered, however, by other texts (e.g., the Upaddha Sutta and Dighajanu Sutta) in which the Buddha declares that traveling with “admirable friends” (*kalyāṇa-mittatā*) is crucial to faring well on the Eightfold Path. A European sangha or community of Dharmic friends is not only possible; it may be necessary.

As an example of the right “tension” between science and Buddhism, it is possible to draw on contemporary neuroscience to explore and explain the entanglement of solitary and communal practice, but also to exert appropriate care in the process of integrating them in the realization of a European sangha.

We now know that while interacting socially, our neural dynamics can become closely entrained. We also know that meditation destabilizes the neural dynamics associated with both habit formations (*samskāra*) and maintaining a sense of subjective identity, thereby opening possibilities for cultivating greater appreciative and responsive virtuosity. These findings suggest that continued immersion in familial and societal roles will tend to reinforce the neural underpinnings of ►



Picture: pexels-kampus-8380086

“

The early Buddhists
were right.
Solitary and
communal practice
are complementary,
not contradictory.

”

Picture: pexels-cottonbro-5416073

PETER D. HERSHOCK

is Director of the Asian Studies Development Program and Coordinator of the Humane AI Initiative at the East-West Center in Honolulu. His philosophical work makes use of Buddhist conceptual resources to address contemporary issues of global concern. He has authored or edited more than a dozen books on Buddhism, Asian philosophy and contemporary issues.



► our “householder” habits, but also that meditating with others—especially those who are more adept than we are—can foster and sustain the neural conditions needed to dissolve those habits and consolidate patterns of thought, feeling, speech, and action that are consistent with realizing more liberating forms of cognitive, emotional, and bodily presence.

The early Buddhists were right. Solitary and communal practice are complementary, not contradictory. But these same neuroscientific insights also shed critical light on the mechanisms of both “old school” and digitally-mediated indoctrination, the emergence of groupthink, and the blindness to internal contradictions that can develop in isolated and tightly knit communities.

How might these insights inform the realization of a truly European Sangha? Europe is already home to many different practitioner communities, based on distinct monastic, textual, ritual, and meditative lineages. There is great Buddhist variety in Europe. But what might happen if this *variety* were to be transformed into true *diversity* so that the differences among these lineages become the basis of mutual contribution to sustainably shared flourishing?

Buddhist communities have been locally centered throughout Buddhist history. But different “families” of textual and meditative traditions also often lived under a single “monastic roof.” Nalanda, the great Buddhist university that flourished from the 5th to 11th centuries was home to as many as 10,000 students and 2,000 faculty members from across all of Asia and served as a crucible for both doctrinal refinement and interpretative creativity.

Might Nalanda serve as inspiration for building a difference-enriching European Sangha—a collaborative and creative Buddhist community in which lineages and teachings from throughout the Buddhist world come together to share in articulating the meanings-of and means-to truly human-and-planetary flourishing? A worthy ideal into which real effort might be directed? 🧘





50 YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN BUDDHIST UNION: A MILESTONE IN VIENNA

By Carlotta Segre

In April, Vienna hosted a memorable event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the European Buddhist Union (EBU), a significant milestone in the history of Buddhism in Europe. This special gathering brought together representatives from across the continent to reflect on five decades of spiritual growth, collaboration, and cultural exchange within the Buddhist community.

The conference *Buddhism 2075* provided a platform for introspection and forward-looking discussions, thanks to the contributions of keynote speakers: Stephen Batchelor, Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammānā, Peter D. Hershock, Gábor Karsai, and Ioana Spataru. The anniversary event was marked by a lively and diverse assembly. A total of 121 participants attended, representing 80 different Buddhist organizations and associations. These organizations reflected a wide spectrum of Buddhist traditions and schools, underscoring both the unity and the diversity that characterize the European Buddhist landscape.

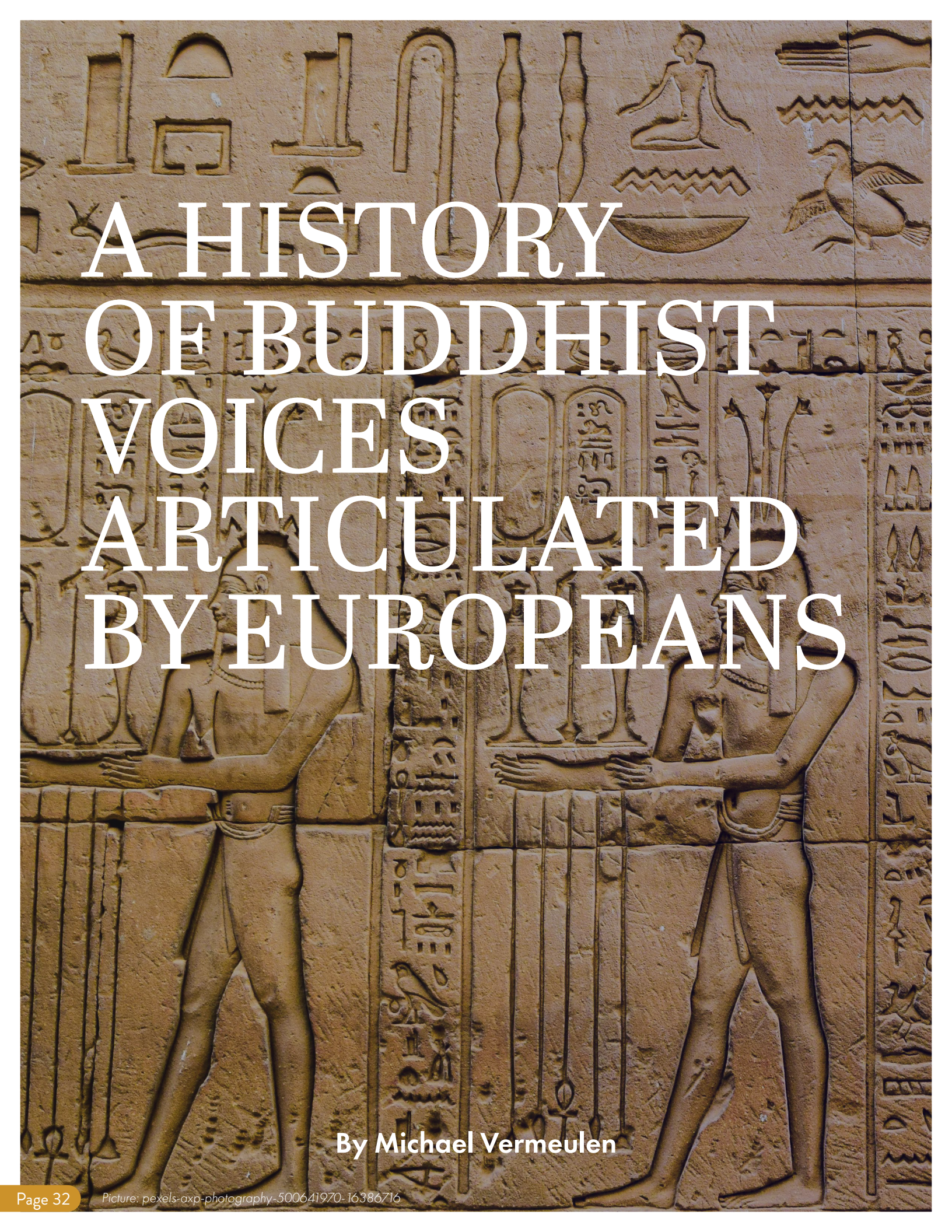
The event also highlighted Europe's rich cultural fabric, with participants from 16 different nations. The presence of representatives from 13 national Buddhist unions further strengthened the gathering, emphasizing the organized commitment and collective voice of Buddhists across the continent.

The meeting revealed how Buddhism in Europe today is distinguished by an unprecedented diversity of traditions: within just a few minutes in a Western city, one can encounter Theravāda, Zen, and Tibetan practitioners—something rarely found in traditional Buddhist countries. This diversity fosters not only dialogue, but also deep reflection on Buddhist identity in a modern and postmodern world.



Fifty years after its formal establishment in Europe, Buddhism finds itself at a crossroads. Its future will depend on its ability to embrace diversity, recover spiritual and ecological depth, and foster inclusive, dialogical communities. Many Buddhists are now moving towards *transmodernism*—a vision that combines scientific inquiry with spirituality, ecological awareness, and pluralism; a broader definition of practice in which activism, climate justice, and social engagement are not separate from the spiritual path but are integral to it.

A transmodern sangha would not only practice meditation or study sacred texts—it would live the Dharma through activism, compassion, shared responsibility, and cultural inclusivity. Ultimately, the task is to build a European Buddhism that is pluralistic, contemplative, embodied, and deeply connected to the world. 🧘

The background of the entire page is a photograph of an ancient Egyptian wall relief. It features two large, standing male figures, likely deities or pharaohs, facing each other. They are adorned with traditional Egyptian clothing, including kilt and broad collar. The figures are flanked by columns of hieroglyphs. Above them, there are smaller figures and symbols, including a seated figure and a bird. The relief is carved into a light-colored stone, showing signs of age and wear.

A HISTORY OF BUDDHIST VOICES ARTICULATED BY EUROPEANS

By Michael Vermeulen

T

his year the European Buddhist Union celebrates its 50th anniversary. Those were the days of the Flower Power when young people in the West revolted to traditional values and looked to the East for new spiritual ideas. It was also the time of the worldwide Tibetan diaspora after the failed uprising in 1959 against the Chinese occupation. All the way to Europe, the world got acquainted with - and fascinated by - the colourful traditions of the Himalaya. These facts seem to support the misconception that many people have that Buddhism came to Europe in the 1960s. But the roots of Buddhist presence in the West go back to the late 19th century and the first European Buddhist centres and organisations were already founded about a hundred years ago. Before then, contacts between Western and Buddhist cultures were only sporadic, with two notable exceptions: Alexandria in Egypt and Alexandria in the (Indian) Caucasus.

A prequel in Antiquity: Buddhists of European descent in the East

It is quite possible that the first contacts between Greek and Buddhist philosophers date back as early as Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE). Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 BCE) was one of the philosophers who joined Alexander, and several academics believe his skepticism was influenced by Buddhist contacts he had in India.

Alexander did indeed go all the way to the Hindu-Kush (the mountains between Persia and India, in antiquity known as the Caucasus Indicus; not to be confused with the present Caucasus mountains at the interception between Europe and Asia), where he founded cities such as Alexandria in the Caucasus (present day Bagram in Afghanistan). This would become one of the capitals of the later Indo-Greek kingdoms of Bactria and Gandhara, founded by descendants of the

colonists from Alexander's time. They had flourishing Buddhist centres and created the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhara with its typical mix of Buddhism and Hellenism. In here the first images and statues of the Buddha were made, most famously depicting the Buddha with the characteristics of the god Apollo dressed in a Greek philosopher's cloak (*himation*). The Greek king Menander (+ 130 BCE) converted to Buddhism and the 'Questions of Menander' (*Milinda Panha*) are included in the Theravada Pali canon.

It is also known that Alexander met the grandfather of the legendary Indian Buddhist emperor Ashoka (274-236 BCE). Ashoka did send Buddhist missionaries to neighbouring regions, but also all the way to Macedonia and Egypt. One of them was the Greek monk Dharmarakshita, the first known person of



► European descent to have become ordained. These missionaries were successful in Asia, but we do not know if they reached their destinations in the West. We do know however that Buddhist monks were later present in Egyptian Alexandria, known as 'Sarmanaioi from Bactria' (from the Sanskrit *sramana*, which was used in the Buddha's time to refer to a wanderer/mendicant monk).

Ptolemy (367-282 BCE) had been a student of Aristotle along with Alexander and became pharaoh after Alexander's death. He was very keen on gathering as much knowledge as possible and founded the famous library. As Buddhist monks were living in Alexandria - and certainly if Ashoka's royal missionaries did reach the Ptolemaic court - it is quite possible that some Buddhist writings were added to the library. We will never know of course, as it was fully destroyed. But the first hard proof that some intellectuals in the West were aware of the Buddha comes again from Alexandria. Church Father Clemens (+ 215 CE) wrote: "*Some too of the Indians obey the precepts of Boutha [Buddha] whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honours.*" (Stromata 1:15).



Picture: pexels-davidmceachan-91409

Under the religiously fanatical emperor Theodosius I (347-395) what remained of the library was burned down and the Roman Empire started isolating itself from any non-Christian thought. There does not seem to have been any significant contact with - or knowledge of - Buddhism since then, all the way till the days of Marco Polo (1254-1324). His adventures were written down in the popular book 'Marvels of the World' (later known as 'The Travels of Marco Polo')

and contain the first complete narrative on the life of the Buddha in the West. It was however not until the 16th and 17th century that Jesuit missionaries started studying Buddhism, and it would take until the 19th century before the first European academics would formulate a coherent understanding of Buddhism.

Buddhists of European descent in the Far West

While Western academics and theologians tried to understand Buddhism in the East, Buddhism itself was also coming to the West. During the gold rush of the 19th century many people migrated from Japan and China to California where they formed the first Mahayana Buddhist communities in America. They made the West acquainted with Zen and Pure Land Buddhism.

Towards the end of the century Buddhism showed worldwide a renewed self confidence after centuries of defensive arguments with Christian missionaries. The talk by the Sri Lankan Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala at the inauguration of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago (11-16 September 1893) made a huge impression on those present and was a symbolic turning point. Some days later (26 September 1893) the New York businessman Charles T. Strauss received the Buddhist precepts in Chicago in the presence of Dharmapala. Strauss was the first known person of European descent to convert to Buddhism in the Americas (some Americans converted earlier but in Asia) and this moment is seen by many as a landmark indicating the emergence of a Western form of Buddhism.

Influence of Buddhist concepts

Meanwhile philosophers and artists noticed how radically different Buddhism was to Western metaphysics. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was the first to explicitly integrate Buddhist concepts in his thinking. Heidegger (1889-1976) was well acquainted ►



- with Zen, and in general, the different perspective and language of the European existentialists resonates strongly with many present day Buddhists. In art a reverse movement occurred to the historical influence of Hellenism. The French Buddhist philosopher Fabrice Midal reminds us how Western artists were inspired by Buddhism, in particular the *ch'i yün* (spiritual tonality) in Zen, to break new ground: *"The Impressionist and post-Impressionist painters did not only turn to Japan to discover a space based on emptiness rather than on the logic of metaphysical representation. Many of them, such as Van Gogh, Sérusier, Gauguin and Odilon Redon, also painted a portrait of the Buddha (...) The entire abstract movement has looked to Buddhism – from Kandinsky to Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock."* (Le bouddhisme et l'art, 2008)

A century of Buddhism in Europe

In 1924 the German physician Paul Dahlke (1865-1928) founded *Das Buddhistische Haus* (DBH - the Buddhist house) in Berlin. This is the oldest still existing Buddhist centre in Europe outside the Russian Federation. Dahlke had become a Theravada Buddhist prior to World War I and was one of the key figures to introduce Buddhism in Germany. Under his guidance DBH became an important centre with daily meetings and regular presentations on Buddhism. He died only four years later and was buried on the property.

DBH is a beautifully preserved domain and is now listed as a National Heritage site. It is also the place where the very first European Buddhist Conference took place in 1933. This was followed by another conference in London in 1934 (at the London Buddhist Vihara - founded in 1926) and a third one in Paris in 1937 (organised by *Les Amis du Bouddhisme* - founded in 1929). One of the projects discussed at these meetings was the creation of a European Buddhist magazine in three languages.

These conferences show the different dynamic between the newly emerging European and American Buddhism: from the early 20th century European Buddhists started organising themselves in ecumenical organisations that included all Asian Buddhist traditions. These are now known as the National Buddhist Unions. World War II made further pan-European initiatives impossible ►

► and it would take till the 1970s before this international dynamic was resumed. The most important post war symposia were however Theravada only, organised by the Pali Buddhist Union (The Hague 1970, Hannover 1972 and London 1974).

1975: The European Buddhist Union (EBU)

A major change for European Buddhism happened when Paul Arnold (1909-1992) realised his bold dream to unite all European Buddhists within one non-denominational pan-European umbrella organisation. Arnold was a judge of the French Supreme Court in Paris and a writer who was twice awarded the prestigious prize of the Académie Française. In 1973 he founded a Buddhist monastery in the Savoy which was a living example of his ecumenical vision: the monastery simultaneously hosted and taught Tibetan, Theravada and Zen traditions.

In 1975 - "after lengthy and difficult negotiations" (Bruno Portigliatti, third president of the EBU) between delegates from the National Buddhist Unions of the UK, France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy and Austria - the European Buddhist Union was founded in London. It was agreed the EBU would be a French non-profit organisation with English as its working language. On 13 October 1975 the first

Annual General Meeting took place in Paris and Paul Arnold was elected as the first EBU president.

One of the goals of the EBU was to restart European conferences for all Buddhist traditions. Unlike the rather modest conferences of the 1930s many of these meetings now attracted hundreds of participants. The first EBU conference took place in 1979 at the prestigious UNESCO headquarters in Paris with participants from 15 countries. The 1992 conference in Berlin had more than 2000 participants. Something had changed: *"It took the horror of two World Wars, which threw into question many core values of European civilisation, before Buddhist ideas really started to take root in European consciousness (...) People experienced profound mental turmoil and confusion. Buddhism appeared to them as a rational religion, another approach to asking the deepest questions of life (...) a system of ideas and values that present a profound challenge to the greed encouraged by our consumer society, the fears that are used to justify military power, even to the entire capitalist system itself."* (Stephen Batchelor, A Buddhist Voice for Europe, speech to the EBU, Budapest, 2010)

European Buddhism has grown fast during the last decades and since its foundation 50 years ago the EBU has managed to place Buddhism on Europe's religious and philosophical map. In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Council of Europe and it is also a permanent partner in ►



Picture: pexels-kyle-miller-973685099-33597944

The European Buddhist Union was founded in London (1975).



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On 13 October 1975 the first Annual General Meeting took place in Paris.

► the dialogue between the European Union and its religions and philosophies. In 2019 an old dream from the first conferences became reality with the launch of the European Buddhist Magazine. It is the only pan-European Buddhist periodical for all traditions. In order to operate from the heart of the EU, the seat was moved in 2022 from Paris to the EU-capital Brussels.

Future voices

Some authors describe the encounter of millennia old Buddhist teachings and practices with the West as the start of a New Renaissance, comparing it to the Renaissance after the fall of Constantinople in 1453: the Greek scholars who fled to Western Europe brought lost knowledge with them which generated a 're-birth' of ancient philosophy and art. We should be aware however that previous 'turnings of the wheel' in Asia took centuries to mature, so it is probably too early to talk about a European or Western Buddhism.

On the other hand it is already clear that women and non-monastics are fully part of - even central to - this process. It is also clear that - unlike the theistic religions - Buddhism shows no missionary desire to dominate, nor does it seem to experience major tensions or anxieties in its encounter with modern science. Former EBU president Frans Goetghebeur defines this as a gradual process of 'harmonious acculturation' (*Les milles visages du bouddhisme*, 2008), for Buddhism "rather shows an extraordinary capacity for integration and that is precisely why it was able to get access to the very different Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan and Southeast Asian civilisations (...) Undoubtedly, after a few decades, an original synthesis will also grow out of the encounter between Buddhism and the West (...) enriched both by the practical experiences and deep research of Westerners, and by the opening of Buddhism to the various areas of Western culture." 🙏



Dr Michael Vermeulen is a philosopher, medical doctor and religious-studies scholar. From 2011 to 2015 he was the representative of the EBU to the European Union, after which he became chair of the EBU Rainbow Sangha. He has been a speaker on several UN conferences on topics related to Human Rights, Queer Buddhism and Buddhist Environmentalism.



WHAT HAS EBU BEEN DOING LATELY?

39

Meeting
the Pope

40

Council
of Europe

42

Teach Peace

46

ECRL



Picture: pexels-luisa-dieguez-2153113331-32569994



Picture provided by Stefano Davide Bettera

Our president had the honour of meeting Pope Leo XIV and conveying the warm greetings of European Buddhists during an audience organised by the Italian Buddhist Union.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE: MOMENTUM FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CONVICTIONAL DIALOGUE

By Gabriela Frey

The Committee for Inter-religious and Inter-convictional Dialogue of the Conference of INGOs (CINGO) at the Council of Europe has entered 2025 with renewed energy.

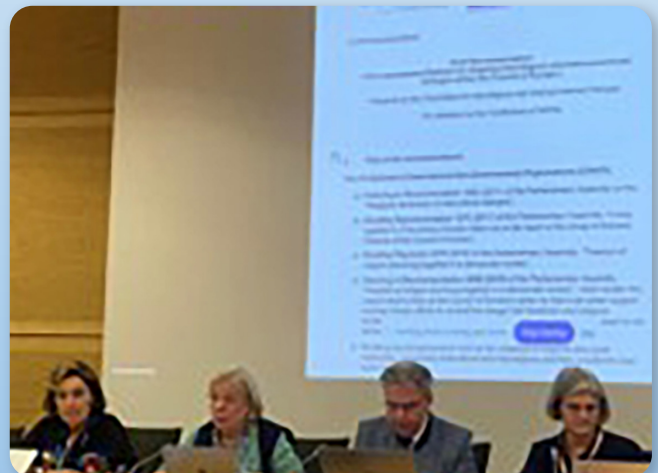
The year began on 28 January with a widely praised side event titled *"For a permanent platform for inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue within the Council of Europe."* Building on this momentum, during the CINGO autumn session (12–16 October), the committee presented a recommendation to formally establish such a platform. It was adopted without dissent.

However, the institutional implementation of this platform will require time, commitment and further work.

To support this process, the committee launched **NIRIC-DIALOGUE**, an online collaborative network collecting best practices, initiatives, resources and contacts in the field of inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue.

During the session, delegates addressed the growing number of conflicts, human rights violations and the erosion of democracy worldwide. The message was clear: preventive action and spaces for genuine dialogue are urgently needed.

Promoting meaningful dialogue is not optional — it is essential to safeguarding democracy, human rights, the rule of law and peace in Europe and beyond. ►





LINKS & RESOURCES

- **NIRIC-DIALOGUE:**
<https://niric-dialogue.eu/>
- **Side-Event Recordings:**
<https://niric-dialogue.eu/webinars-conferences-workshops-trainings/>
- **CINGO (Conference of INGOs) :**
www.coe.int/en/web/ingo
- **Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue:**
www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/committee-for-interreligious-interconvictional-dialogue
- **Recommendation text:**
<https://rm.coe.int/conf-ag-2025-rec5-draft-recommendation-for-a-permanent-platform-for-on/488028ba77>



Gabriela Frey - EBU Head of Delegation to the Council of Europe since 2008, the year in which participatory status was granted. Initiator and co-chair of the Committee for Interreligious and Interconfessional Dialogue at the Conference of INGOs. She has been a Buddhist for over 40 years and is a practitioner of the Tibetan Sakya tradition. Passionate about true gender equality in Buddhist communities, she founded Sakyadhita France, the French branch of the International Association of Buddhist Women, and initiated the network of Buddhist women in Europe. 🧘

Pictures in this article have been provided by Gabriela Frey.

TEACH PEACE: A QUIET REVOLUTION IN CLASSROOMS

NEWS
FROM
THE
EBU!



Picture: pexels-pixabay-301926

By David Rycroft



In schools across Europe, a quiet revolution is unfolding. Teach Peace is helping teachers and students discover simple, sustainable ways to nurture calm, connection, and compassion in everyday school life. The project's guiding idea is straightforward yet powerful: when teachers embody peace, students learn it naturally—through example, empathy, and everyday interaction.

Teach Peace has been active in over a dozen schools in Slovenia, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Scotland, England and Germany. From early-years classes to secondary schools, more than 200 teachers and about two thousand students have taken part in activities such as morning breathing exercises, gratitude journals, and quiet reflection spaces. Each project is locally adapted, but all share a common thread: empowering teachers to lead from within, supported by a network of peers and trainers.

Teach Peace supports schools to weave emotional awareness and relational skills into their routines. Instead of adding another “programme,” it helps educators create a shared culture of attentiveness, kindness, and care. The training empowers teachers to guide short mindfulness or emotional-health exercises, strengthen communication skills, and reflect together on their own well-being. Over time, these small,



consistent practices build a calmer, more connected atmosphere—benefiting both staff and students.

At Sveta Ana Primary School in Slovenia, the whole staff—31 teachers including the principal—took part in Teach Peace training. Working closely with Slovenian trainer Saša Kerkoš, they created an approach that felt authentic to their community. Using the school loudspeaker system, every morning begins with a short breathing exercise led by teachers for all students.

This daily, school-wide routine has become a shared anchor, helping students start the day with focus and calm. Teachers who were initially hesitant found encouragement from colleagues who had already experienced the benefits. This peer-to-peer support strengthened the initiative and made it sustainable. As one teacher reflected, “At first I was reluctant—but then something clicked. Now I even teach my grandson how to stop and breathe instead of react.”

The story is similar at Colegio Buenos Aires in Madrid, where teachers took part in a structured mindfulness ►



Teach Peace



- ▶ and compassion-training course led by Victoria Martín-Moreno. What began as professional development soon grew into a grassroots movement: teachers began meeting for a voluntary 20-minute meditation before the school day. Even colleagues not enrolled in the course joined in, drawn by the sense of calm and solidarity it created. In classrooms, teachers adapted what they learned into age-appropriate exercises—such as “frog breathing,” “listening to the bell,” or short gratitude reflections. These sessions helped children manage stress, develop emotional vocabulary, and build a gentler classroom tone.



A key lesson from Teach Peace has learned from participating schools is the importance of teachers supporting teachers. When more experienced or confident teachers mentor others, it builds trust and shared ownership. Sustainable change doesn't rely on external experts but grows from within the staff community itself. This spirit of collaboration also extends to language: many educators find it helpful to use terms like soft skills, emotional health, or attention training rather than “mindfulness” or “meditation,” especially in contexts where those words may be misunderstood. What matters is not the label, but the lived experience of calm and compassion.

Teach Peace reminds us that peace in education is not a lofty ideal—it's a daily practice. It begins with a breath, a pause, a moment of listening between colleagues.

To explore more on the background and vision of teaching peace in Europe, visit the [Teach Peace Articles page](#). ▶



David Rycroft is director of **Teach Peace**. He is also a director of Mind With Heart, an international charity training teachers and students in sustainable wellbeing, emotional health and social connection. David has 20 years experience in training mindfulness instructors and school teachers in tools for emotional health and in sharing these with teenagers. Educated at Eton College and Edinburgh University, he taught art in a London secondary school for ten years before co-founding Mind With Heart. David is also a practising artist. 🧘



NEWS
FROM
THE
EBU!

BRIDGING FAITH IN A FRACTURED WORLD: THE WORK OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Picture: pexels-yanis-papadopoulos-1296651697-31696651

By Ron Eichhorn

In a time when global tensions and religious identities can so easily become dividing lines, the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) stands as a quiet yet steadfast force for dialogue and peace. As a founding member of Religions for Peace Europe (RfPE), the council brings together senior figures from Europe's major religious traditions—leaders who choose collaboration over isolation, and moral clarity over silence. Among them is Ron Eichhorn, former president of the European Buddhist Union, who now serves as the Buddhist representative and one of the council's Vice Presidents.

Created in 2002 in Norway, the ECRL was born out of a simple yet profound conviction: that religious leaders hold not only influence within their communities, but also a responsibility to foster understanding and prevent conflict. The council draws on the shared spiritual, ethical and moral heritage of the world's faiths to promote peace, social cohesion and human dignity across Europe and beyond.

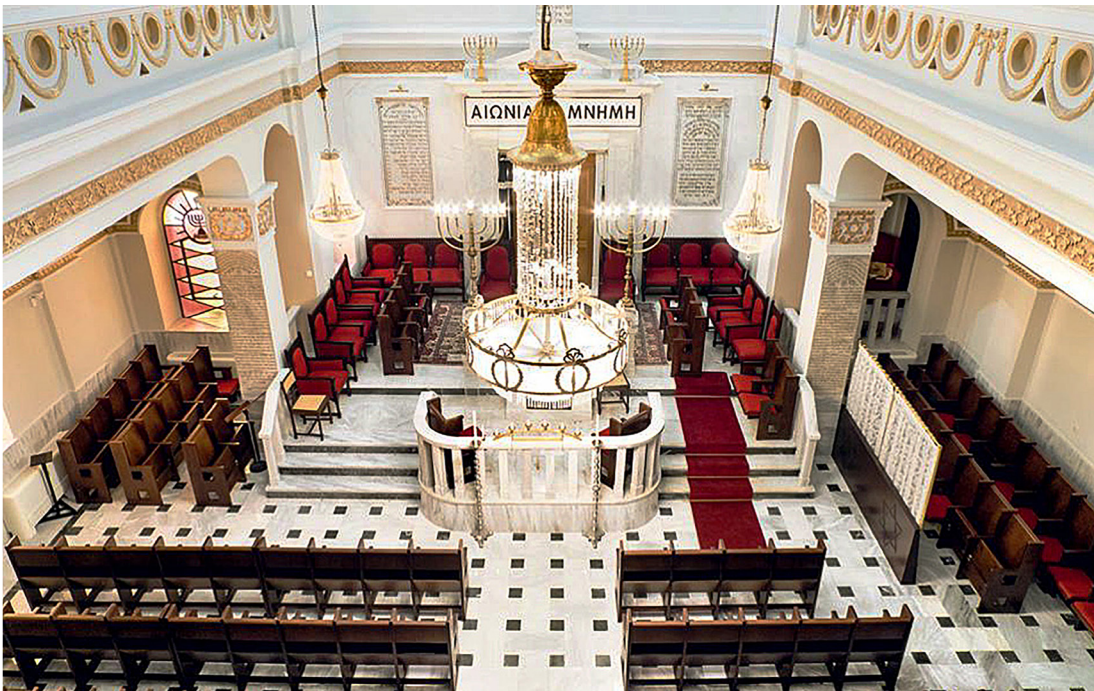
Its most recent gathering took place on September 29–30 at the Jewish Community Center in Thessaloniki, a city once known as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans."

Here, representatives from diverse faiths addressed one of the most pressing challenges of our time: how religious communities can respond together to conflict and rising intolerance. Unsurprisingly, the war in Gaza—deeply affecting both Jewish and Muslim communities across Europe—took center stage.

The discussions were candid. While dialogue remains essential, participants acknowledged its limits. Words alone cannot heal wounds or prevent violence. True progress, they argued, requires shared action—standing together, even when beliefs differ, in defense of human dignity.

Religious leaders, the council affirmed, are not just custodians of tradition. They are moral compasses. When injustice unfolds and human life is devalued, neutrality is not an option. Silence sends a message—often the wrong one. To lead means to be present, to speak clearly, and to point toward compassion, even in moments of profound division.

In Thessaloniki, the ECRL did exactly that—demonstrating that unity does not mean uniformity, and that courage in faith is not shown by withdrawal, but by showing up. ►



Ron Eichhorn is the husband of Miriam and a practicing Buddhist for over 35 years. He is a former president of the EBU, serves as abbot of the Berlin temple of the Yun Hwa Sangha, and is active in interfaith initiatives on an international level. Ron is a professional film director and also makes Natural Wine in Vienna. In his spare time, he started to do pottery and likes to go sailing. 🧘

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The EBU was founded in 1975 in London and is a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders and Religions for Peace.

In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe.

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 EuropeanBuddhistUnion



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