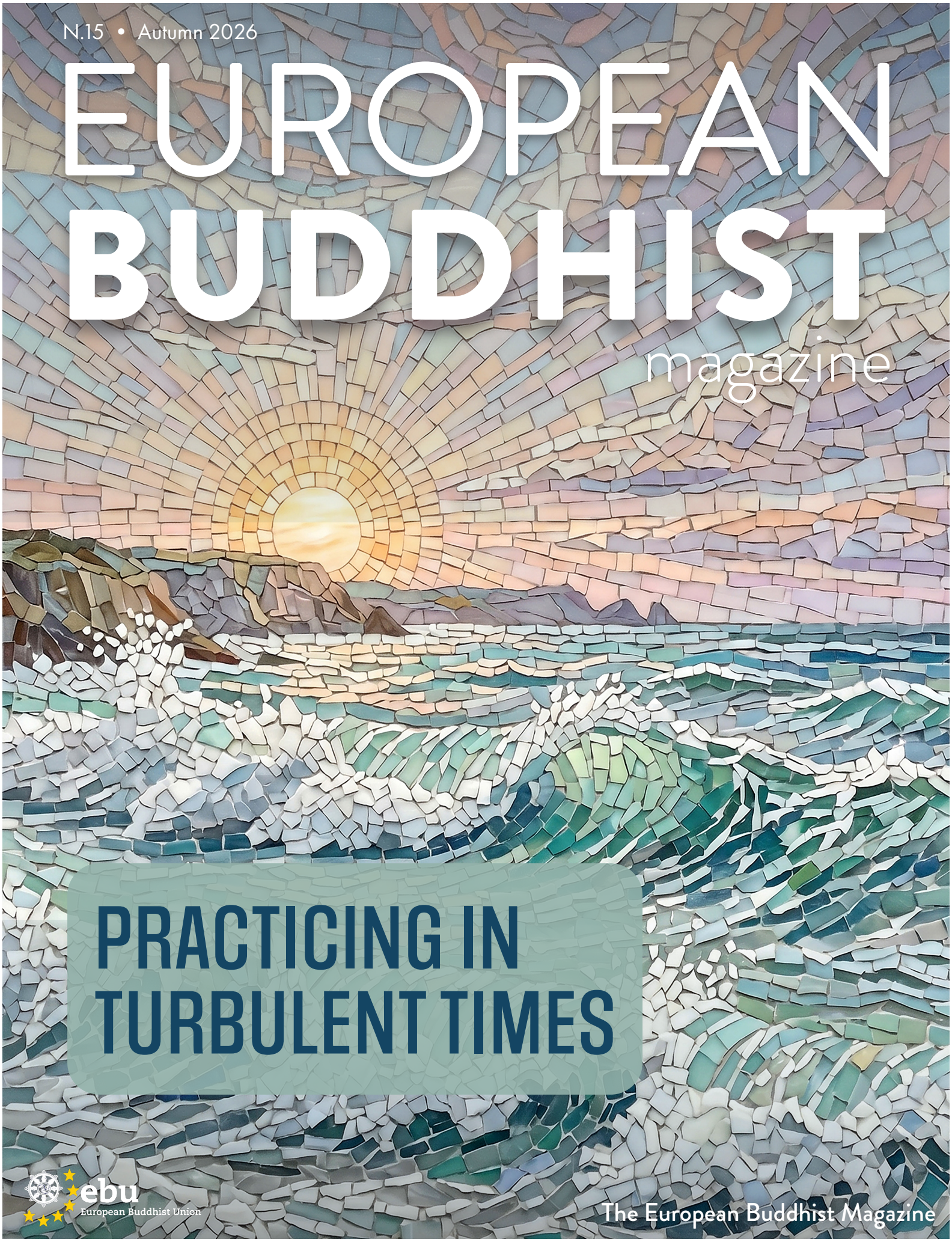
N.15 • Autumn 2026

EUROPEAN BUDDHIST magazine



PRACTICING IN TURBULENT TIMES

ebu
European Buddhist Union

The European Buddhist Magazine

C·O·N·T·E·N·T

04 Religious Freedom Under Pressure: The European Buddhist Union and the Future of Rights in Europe

08 Editorial Ron Eichhorn

10 EBU AGM 2027 News & Agenda

12 Religious freedom for Buddhists in Europe

18 The value of ART17

20 When Buddhism Meets Islam: Brussels Opens a New Chapter in European Interfaith Dialogue

24 European Buddhists and Muslims Open a New Chapter in Interfaith Dialogue

28 Dharma in Israel - The Felt Risk to Dharma Values in a Contracting Society

32 Dharma Under Shelling: Our Testimony from Ukraine

40 Freedom of Religion or Belief for Buddhists in Hungary: Recognition, Education, and Institutional Challenges

44 Digital Fairness by Design: Regulating Digital Environments for Human Well-being

Picture Cover page: This content was generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence, Adobe Firefly Firefly_make a mosaic image of a turbulent ocean, and in the back of the image a rising sun, 574429

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Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs in Europe:

Building Fraternity through Dialogue and Collaboration



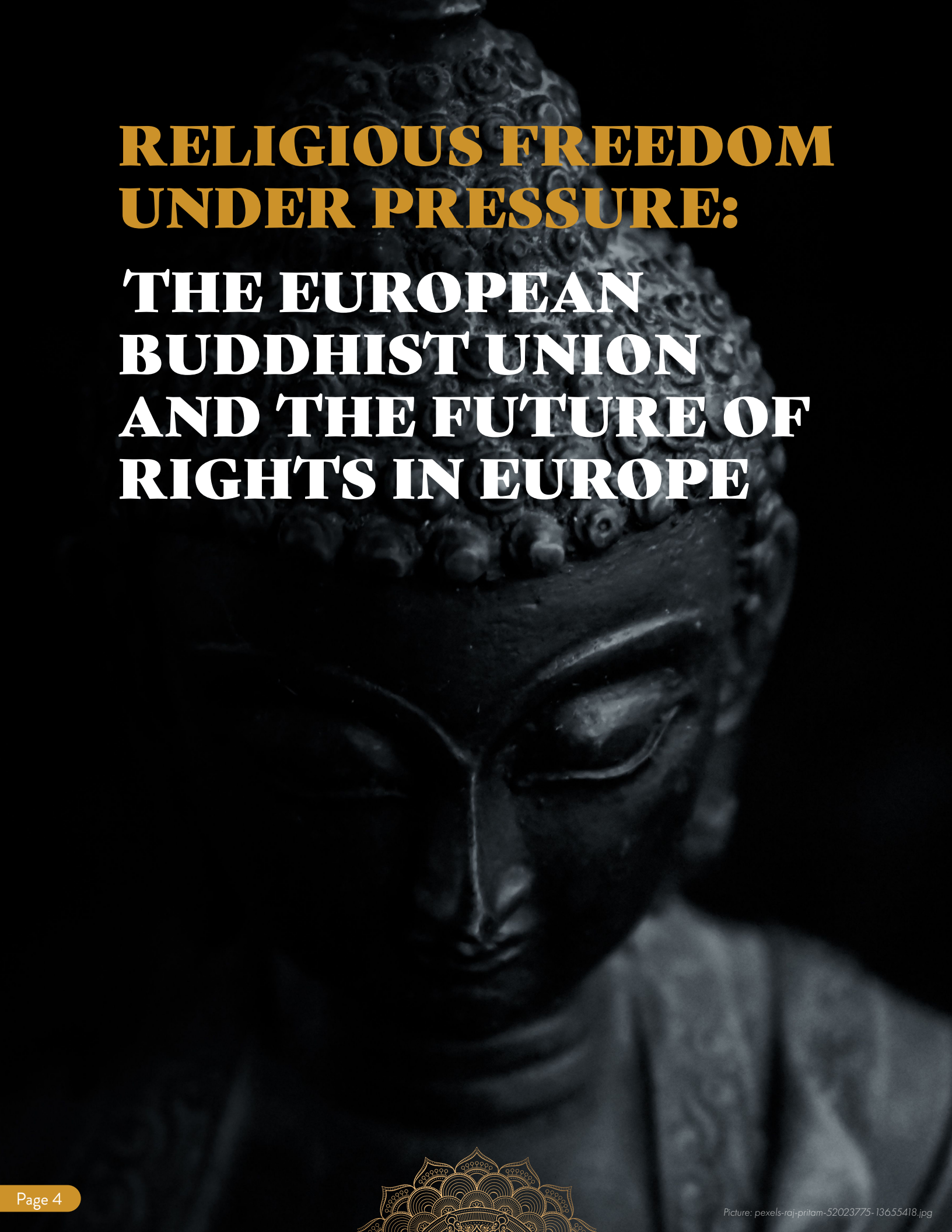
REGISTRATION & PROGRAM

23-24 JUNE 2026

AULA MINOR, PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS (ANGELICUM)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM UNDER PRESSURE:

THE EUROPEAN BUDDHIST UNION AND THE FUTURE OF RIGHTS IN EUROPE



Picture: pexels-raj-pritam-52023775-13655418.jpg

On 9 May 2026, Brussels hosted the annual assembly of the European Buddhist Union, EBU, bringing together representatives of Buddhist communities from across the continent. This year's theme — *"Respect for the Religious Rights of Buddhists in Europe"* — is anything but symbolic. It reflects a growing awareness that freedom of belief and religious practice, long regarded as cornerstones of European democracy, can no longer be taken for granted.

Europe finds itself in a period marked by profound strain: armed conflicts at its borders, deepening political polarisation within, and the resurgence of nationalist rhetoric and intolerance that challenge cultural and religious pluralism. In such a climate, even communities traditionally perceived as quiet presences in public life — including Buddhist communities — encounter legal, social and cultural obstacles that restrict the full expression of their religious identity.

What Is Buddhism Without Freedom?

The central question guiding this year's assembly was as simple as it was radical: how can one practise one's faith when social, political and cultural conditions act as a constraint — or even an outright prohibition? The issue extends beyond the formal guarantees enshrined in European treaties. It concerns the lived reality of faith: the ability to practise openly, to transmit teachings, to organise communities and to be recognised as a legitimate part of Europe's plural fabric.

A key moment of the day was devoted to testimonies from delegations representing Ukraine, Poland, Greece and Hungary. In each of these contexts — albeit in different ways — Buddhist communities report challenges ranging from limited legal recognition to cultural environments that are less than receptive to non-traditional religious minorities. Their voices offered a tangible insight into what it means to practise one's faith where pluralism feels fragile or under pressure.

Engaging the Institutions

The assembly did not confine itself to testimony. It also fostered dialogue with European institutions and the academic world. Among the most anticipated contributions was that of Professor Marco Ventura of the University of Siena, whose research focuses on religious freedom and the relationship between states, the European Union and faith communities.

His intervention addressed what remains incomplete within the European legal and political architecture: uneven legal instruments, inconsistent national applications, and a broader lack of sustained political attention to the needs of minority religious communities. The question is not merely whether rights exist on paper, but whether they are effectively implemented and defended.

A Wider Europe

This gathering was more than a forum for raising concerns. It was also conceived as a space for collective reflection. Discussions revolved around essential themes: the meaning of a European Buddhist identity; the practice of faith under conditions of limitation; sustained networking with EU institutions; and the role of the EBU as a bridge between Brussels and local communities, including those geographically distant or numerically small.

Particular emphasis was placed on dialogue with what might be described as the "wider Europe" — understood less in geographical or political terms than in cultural ones. This includes regions such as Israel and countries bordering the Black Sea, areas with long-standing Buddhist traditions and historical ties that extend beyond today's political boundaries.

Building the Common Home

Ultimately, what is at stake is not solely the protection of a specific spiritual tradition, but the democratic quality of Europe as a whole. The choice of Brussels as the venue carries clear symbolic and political weight. As the capital of the European Union and the city where many fundamental rights policies take shape, it is also the natural home of the EBU. ▶

To convene here is to bring the voice of Europe's Buddhist communities into the very heart of the decision-making process — and to reaffirm that religious freedom is not a peripheral concern but a litmus test of democratic health. At a time when the very idea of Europe is contested, the annual assembly of the European Buddhist Union seeks to offer a lucid and necessary moment of reflection: a reminder that without respect for difference — religious, cultural and spiritual — there can be no credible, inclusive and future-oriented European project.





Pictures taken at the AGM.







Pictures taken at the AGM.

Editorial
Ron Eichhorn

What We Are Practising For

Dear readers, dear friends,

An issue of this magazine usually takes shape slowly. This one arrived almost fully formed, out of a single day in Brussels.

On 9 May, the European Buddhist Union held its Annual General Meeting under the theme "Respect for the Religious Rights of Buddhists in Europe". What was planned as an examination of a legal question became something less comfortable and far more valuable. Delegations from Ukraine, Poland, Greece and Hungary took the floor, and the abstraction of "religious rights" dissolved into biographies.

You will find those voices in these pages. Denys and Oleksandra, who lived through the occupations of Mariupol and Bucha, describe what remains of practice when classical meditation is no longer possible: a mantra said once in the mind before running on, awareness held in the smallest things. Tamar Zekbach writes from Israel about a paradox that is easy to miss from the outside. The legal right to sit on a cushion is intact; the spiritual freedom to live the values one sits for is not. Gábor Karsai shows a third version of the same question in Hungary, where nothing is forbidden and yet not everything is possible.

Three very different situations, and one shared insight: freedom of religion is not settled by the sentence in the constitution that guarantees it.

Marco Ventura, whose keynote we publish in full, gives that insight a structure. The religious freedom we need, he argues, is legal, inclusive, diverse, European and Buddhist. I would underline the last two. Europe is not a backdrop for our communities; it is the experiment we are part of, with all of its unfinished business. And nobody will stand up for our particular form of that freedom if we do not. Nicola Censini's contribution from the European Parliament is a reminder that the door of Article 17 is genuinely open. It is up to us to walk through it often enough that our absence would be noticed.

Picture: pexels-leoohigh-2326920-12941657

Then there is the encounter that may prove the most consequential thing we did in Brussels. Together with EULEMA, the European Muslim Leaders Majlis, Buddhists and Muslims sat down for a structured conversation, something that has happened remarkably rarely in Europe. Imam Yahya Pallavicini is honest in these pages about what I also noticed in the room: we were busy with hospitality and logistics and only half aware that something was beginning. Buddhists and Muslims in Europe share more than we usually admit, not least the experience of being explained to others and read through a geopolitics we did not choose. Dialogue of this kind does not blur traditions. It asks both partners to know exactly where they stand.

Stefano Bettera turns to turbulence of another kind: the digital environments now shaping attention, belief and self-understanding, and the temptation to delegate to a machine not only our tasks but our judgement. As someone who works with images professionally and with clay in the evenings, I have a good deal of sympathy for tools. A tool that offers to feel on our behalf is a different proposition, and the traditions represented in this magazine hold several thousand years of experience with the question of who, exactly, is looking.

What holds these contributions together is not optimism. It is the refusal to treat compassion as a luxury that can be suspended until conditions improve. Our friends in Ukraine and in Israel are not asking to be admired. They are asking for attention, for solidarity, and in some cases for practical help; where that help can be given, you will find the contact details printed here.

Turbulent times have one advantage. They make it unmistakably clear what we are practising for.

With warm wishes,

Ron Eichhorn
Editor, The European Buddhist Magazine



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.

EBU NEWS

SEE YOU IN FRANKFURT:
EBU ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2027

A weekend to meet, share and shape our Union, with Council elections ahead

From 30 April to 2 May 2027, the European Buddhist Union will gather for its Annual General Meeting at Tibethaus Deutschland in Frankfurt. The AGM is much more than a business meeting: it is a chance to meet in person, reconnect with friends from across Europe, and look together at the path ahead for our community.

New this year: Many Paths, One Sangha

NEW THIS YEAR!

We open the weekend on Friday afternoon with a session that is all about you. The EBU brings together communities from many countries, traditions and languages. What connects us, and what could we create together? In this participatory session, we will get to know each other beyond names and titles, share what our European Buddhist network means to us, and gather ideas you would love to see grow. No reports, no minutes: just good conversation, open hearts, and your voice. ***Please bring one story or one idea: what would make the EBU truly yours?*** On Sunday morning, we will return to these ideas in a shared reflection on the future of the EBU.

Council elections: a call for candidates

ELEC-TIONS YEAR!

This year's AGM carries a special significance: **the EBU Council will be elected for a new four-year term**. The Council guides the work of our Union, connects our member organisations, and helps give Buddhism in Europe a shared voice. It is a role of service, and a rewarding one. On Saturday morning, just before the vote, the candidates will introduce themselves in a ***Meet the Candidates*** session, so everyone can get to know the people who will help shape the EBU in the years ahead.

If you feel drawn to contribute your experience, energy and ideas, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please send your application to Michael Ritman m.ritman@europeanbuddhistunion.org by the end of 2026, including a short introduction and a few words on your motivation.

On Saturday afternoon, we open our doors to the public for a conference that begins with inter-religious blessings and then turns to a timely question: ***How can we remain human in the age of AI?***

The EBU is only as alive as the people who bring it to life.
We look forward to welcoming you in Frankfurt!

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AGENDA · EBU AGM 2027

(Draft)

FRI. 30/04

Tibethaus Deutschland e.V.
Georg-Voigt-Straße 4,
60325 Frankfurt I Germany

13:30 - 14:30	Council meeting
15:00 - 17:30	Many Paths, One Sangha: interactive session for all delegates
18:00 - 19:30	National Unions Presidents meeting

SAT. 01/05

Tibethaus Deutschland e.V.
Georg-Voigt-Straße 4,
60325 Frankfurt I Germany
(afternoon venue: TBA)

09:30 - 10:30	Meet the Candidates: Council elections 2027
10:45 - 13:00	Legal AGM 2027, including Council elections
15:00 - 17:30	Public Conference: How to remain human in the age of AI
17:30 - 18:00	Presentation of the AGM minutes

SUN. 02/05

Tibethaus Deutschland e.V.
Georg-Voigt-Straße 4,
60325 Frankfurt I Germany

09:30 - 12:00	Our community: reflection on the future of the EBU · Closing

Religious freedom for Buddhists in Europe

By Marco Ventura

European Buddhist Union
Annual General Meeting
Bruxelles, May 9 · 2026



Picture: created with artificial Intelligence: Firefly_ make an image representing the buildings of all religions, all next to each oth 586669

Introduction

I will take inspiration from the title of this gathering – religious freedom for Buddhists in Europe – and will briefly elaborate on what I see as the religious freedom Buddhists need in Europe, but also the religious freedom Europe needs the Buddhists to stand for. This religious freedom, I will argue, is defined by **five features**: it is legal, inclusive, diverse, European and Buddhist. I will now go through the five features, one by one, before the conclusion.

1. Legal religious freedom

First and foremost, religious freedom is supposed to protect from undue State interference on the one hand and from social hostility or oppression on the other. This can only be achieved if religious freedom does not only rely on culture and society, but is solidly built in the law of the land, in European law and in international law. In fact, as a human right, religious freedom has a distinctive legal dimension. The state has the negative obligation to abstain from restricting religious freedom through its agents and actions: on the one hand, restrictions on the right to have, change or not to have a religion or belief are absolutely nor permissible; on the other hand, only those restrictions of the manifestation of religious freedom are permissible which are strictly necessary and proportionate in a democratic society to pursue a legitimate aim defined by the law. The state also has the positive obligation to prevent and combat impermissible restrictions which might occur in the society.

The legal infrastructure of religious freedom is quintessential. It helps giving shape to a democratic and pluralistic political process, to frame the responsibility of individuals and institutions, to structure procedures and actions. Legal religious freedom is about the status and the recognition you need and are entitled to; but it is also about the freedom not to be forced into an undesirable status with no detriment for the enjoyment with religious freedom rights, or into some kind of recognition you do not want to seek for.

The legal feature of religious freedom is of essence for the protection of Buddhists in Europe, but also for their organisation, their responsibility, their actions, and ultimately, their participation in society. In his 'The interaction of law and religion' Harold Berman posits that «Law is not only a body of rules; it is people legislating, adjudicating, administering, negotiating – it is a living process of allocating rights and duties and thereby resolving conflicts and creating channels of cooperation». Indeed, legal religious freedom is that 'living process'. ▶



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2. Inclusive religious freedom

It is not possible to isolate religious freedom from the intense conflicts we face in our society and globally. As we observe in large parts of the world, religious freedom is systematically denied, in practice if not in theory. As we observe in culture wars in the US, religious freedom is easily weaponized as a partisan tool and discredited. As we observe in Europe, even within the European Union, large sectors of the public opinion, influential politicians, government officials and even judges understand religious freedom in very narrow and selective terms. The distinctions of religion and non-religion, majorities and minorities, traditional and non-traditional, new and old, big and small, hierarchical and non-hierarchical, sometimes even extremist and foreign as opposed to moderate and indigenous are mobilized in order to justify restrictions or inequalities. Against this background, inclusive religious freedom is what Buddhists in Europe need and are entitled to.

This is what religious freedom looks like anyway, if we consider the international documents produced in the last thirty years, especially by the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations. The formula FoRB – freedom of religion or belief – is the result of that elaboration: it captures the variety of believers and non-believers protected by international instruments and constitutional laws, and the complex articulation of the relevant freedom. «Freedom of thought, conscience and religion», and «freedom to manifest one's religion or belief» are the component of art. 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and art. 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights and art. 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

This means that there is no one fits all model of what religion or belief should look like for the sake of their legal protection. Categories should be handled with extreme caution, as through the law and beyond the law, Europe is learning how to be at the same time multi-religious, multi-cultural and secularized, less religious or differently religious. This is reflected in the formulation of article 17 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, where both «churches and religious associations or communities» and «philosophical and nonconfessional organisations» are recognized with their «identity» and «specific contribution» and included in the dialogue with the Union.

Now, if one wants to assess whether the command of an inclusive religious freedom is taken seriously in the European Union and beyond, or whether the slogan of 'FoRB for all' is taken seriously, there is no better test than the trajectory of Buddhists in Europe. Your achievements and failures in asserting yourself witness how challenging true inclusivity can be and how much we need an inclusive religious freedom: for Buddhists and for all through Buddhists.



Picture: This content was generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence, Adobe Firefly Firefly_an image with a mix of all main religions, happy, enjoying, in the nature 586669

3. Diverse religious freedom

If law is to be broadly construed as a 'living process', religion is also to be broadly construed for the sake of a serious protection. Again Harold Berman to make this point: «Religion is not only a set of doctrines and exercises; it is people manifesting a collective concern for the ultimate meaning and purpose of life – it is a shared intuition of and commitment to transcendent values».

The challenge of going inclusive with religious freedom is a challenge inherently pertaining to the diversity, ▶

multiformity of religion as a deeply multi-dimensional reality. Different believers and non-believers have different needs and different claims. It is not enough for them to be included, if they are not included with their diversity. It is not enough for legal religious freedom to be an inclusive religious freedom if that comes at the detriment of diversity. Inclusive religious freedom can be the foe of diverse religious freedom. This is the case when registration and recognition procedures demand uniformity, when diverse organisations are forced into the same format, when the law produces sameness instead of facilitating otherness.

If we take religious or belief diversity seriously, we cannot underestimate the risk of uniformity, aware as we are that structural formatting through state law might imply – I would be tempted to say, inevitably implies – substantial formatting of principles, doctrines, precepts, liturgies, and everything religious or belief organisations rely upon in the pursuit of their unique, authentic path. Diverse religious freedom is thus needed along with legal and inclusive religious freedom. On this vein, the reference to the «identity» and «specific contribution» of religion and belief organisations at art. 17 TFEU should be understood and operated with a true engagement for religion or belief diversity. This can be very demanding on both sides: it is challenging for state officials – and societies at large – to relinquish control and renounce the ambition to push for reassuring conformity; but it is also challenging for religious or belief organisations to assert their independence from state support and stay true to their uniqueness.

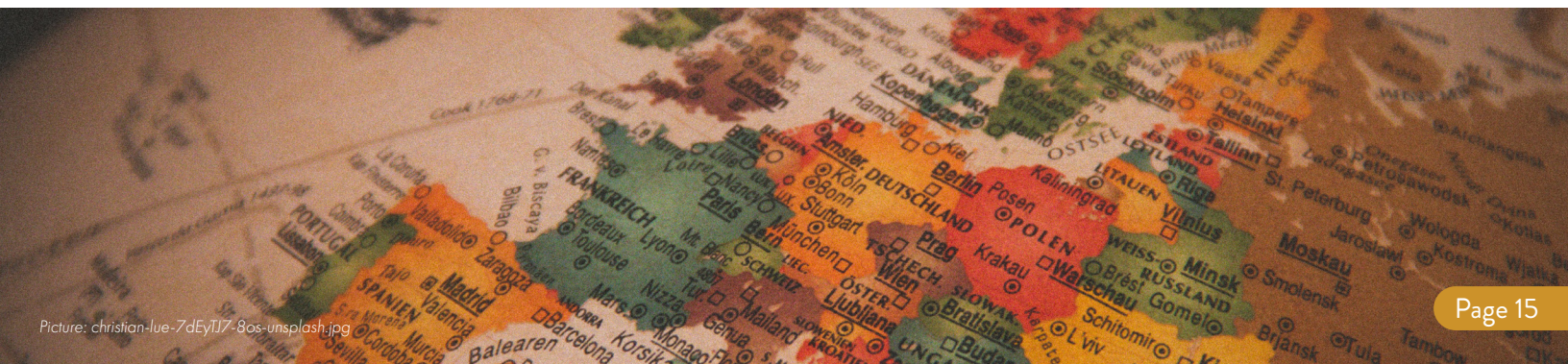
Again, Buddhists are very well placed to witness the struggle for diverse religious freedom. And again, as diverse religious freedom is needed for Buddhists in Europe, Europe also needs Buddhists to stand for diverse religious freedom. Which brings us to our fourth feature.

4. *European religious freedom*

The fourth feature pertains to the European element of religious freedom. Since World War II, with the emergence of international human rights, and in the last thirty years in particular, religious freedom has been asserted, at least in principle, by international institutions. In particular, in the European integration process, European states and pan-European institutions have played a unique, and remarkable role.

Thanks to the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe religious freedom has developed across national borders as a human right to be advanced through the political intergovernmental process, in the OSCE system, and through the international justiciability established by the Council of Europe driven system of the European Convention and the European Court of human rights. A lot has been disappointing and frustrating with both systems, a lot can be criticized, and yet they represent a unique experiment of transnational dialogue – and even convergence – on the secular state, religious rights, in particular on the autonomy of religious or belief organisations, with national authorities, and supreme and constitutional courts specifically, both contributing to and learning from the process. Those who value a European religious freedom are thus aware of such an experiment with human rights and religion and are committed to its development.

Europe has also witnessed the growth of a largely unintended law and policy on religion or belief through the single market of the European Union. This is partly coinciding with the human rights systems, insofar as the European Union has expanded its reach as to commit itself to the protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms in general and freedom of religion or belief in particular. But what I would define the law and policy of the EU on religion and belief has a much broader



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scope. My hypothesis is that it is possible to identify four channels through which the development of the EU has been and still is deeply significant for religious freedom: 1) the non-alignment of the European Unoin with any religion, and the debate on neutrality, impartiality, secularism and the Christian or Judeo-Christian identity or roots of Europe; 2) the «open, transparent and regular» EU dialogue with religious or belief organisations mandated by article 17 TFEU; 3) the EU competence on religion to be negotiated against the twofold limit of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity: it is not for Brussels to decide what is better decided in Madrid or Warsaw; and it is not for the EU Commission to decide which mantra should be recited and how; and yet, it is healthy that Madrid and Warsaw are not alone, and even that monasteries are not alone, if the dialogue with the EU is developed in a meaningful way; 4) EU action on FoRB within and especially outside the European Union, in particular through actions on religion and development of the kind of the 'religion in society' project.

In this case as well, the European feature of religious freedom is a reminder that Buddhists need to be both aware of the specific EU challenge with religion or belief, and responsible for it. The voice of Buddhists is much needed at the Commission, at the Parliament, at the various EU levels and bodies and actions, and even at the Court of Justice of the EU, a formidable actor, especially through its decisions on employment and non-discrimination such as the very recent one, last March, on the German case of Katolische Schwangerschaftsberatung, when the judges in Luxembourg set limits to dismissal of an employee by a Catholic social association on account of her decision to leave the Church.

If a legal, inclusive, and diverse religious freedom is needed by Buddhists, and if Buddhists are needed in the advancement of that freedom, the European Union is a critical experiment within the broader experiment of cross-national European religious freedom.



Picture: pexels-suki-lee-1106869 49-16249952

5. *Buddhist religious freedom*

Here comes the fifth feature. The Buddhist character of religious freedom. Of course, I have no pretense to identify, much less to dictate, what could be specifically Buddhist about religious freedom in general. What I mean by this fifth feature is that the four previous features are needed by Buddhists in Europe insofar as Buddhists can appropriate, understand and reinvent those features in their own distinctive ways, through their internal witnessing of the legal (their Dharma), the inclusive (their union, the U of EBU), the diverse (their plurality) and even the European (their Europeanness, the E of EBU).

In the preparation of this keynote, I have gone back to my first religion related meeting in Brussels, in 2001, in the context of what was then the EU Commission initiative called «A Soul for Europe». In my folder I have the list of participants. Amongst them was Kenneth Holmes from the Kaguy Samye Ling Monastery in Scotland, the first Tibetan Buddhist Centre to have been established in the West. I have also found an unsigned document of 5 pages, presumably from Kenneth Holmes himself, presenting first «what Buddhist groups are and need to protect» and second their «participation in the future of Europe». Twenty-five years from then, a lot in that text can be identified as an extraordinarily clear view on what is at stake with both religious freedom in the European integration and the participation of Buddhists to the process. As clear a vision is if possible even more crucial today, when Europe is confronted with multiple crisis within and outside, and the partners in the dialogue between religious or belief organizations and the European Union have a key contribution to give, and an equally key responsibility to bear. ▶

Conclusion

I have presented five features that tentatively define at the same time which religious freedom is needed for Buddhists in Europe, and which religious freedom Buddhists need to stand up for in Europe. That religious freedom is legal, inclusive, diverse, European and Buddhist.

The 2001 document on Buddhists and the EU I mentioned above, raised the question of what Buddhists need in terms of property, promotion through the media, fundraising, bringing ministers from extra EU countries, organizing meetings and ceremonies, employment. We learn from that list that religious freedom is a very practical, down to earth, everyday matter for believers and their communities. The document also raised the question of «an efficient consultative process» at the EU level in view of the contribution from all faiths to ethical issues, «helping the poor and the needy», «the environment, especially the sentient part of Nature», immigration and education. We learn from this other list that religious freedom is also a matter of general concern, well beyond the contingency of one specific community.

Today, no less than in 2001, we should care for the religious freedom of Buddhists in Europe if we care for Buddhists, of course, and even more, if we care for Europeans, the whole of mankind and all forms of life.





Marco Ventura is Professor of Law and Religion at the University of Siena, Italy, where he has taught since 2001. He holds a PhD from the University of Strasbourg (1992) and previously taught at KU Leuven (Belgium).

He is an associate researcher at the University of Strasbourg/CNRS and serves on several international academic and research boards. From 2016–2022, he was an OSCE/ODIHR expert on freedom of religion or belief, contributing to key policy guidance.

He has advised EU and international initiatives on religion, security, human rights, and interfaith dialogue, including G20 Interfaith Summits and EU–Vietnam and EU–Gulf Cooperation Council dialogues.

From 2016–2021, he directed the Center for Religious Studies at Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento. He has also held leadership roles in European research networks on Church and State.

His research focuses on freedom of religion or belief, law and religion, comparative religious law, and the politics of religion. He has authored seven books and over 100 articles in Italian, French, and English, with works translated into several languages.

Picture: This content was generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence, Adobe Firefly
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SPEECH FOR THE AGM:

THE VALUE OF ART17



Nicola CENSINI

Coordinator for Article 17 TFEU
Dialogue with Churches, religious
and non-confessional organisations

European Parliament
Secretariat of the Bureau and
the Quaestors

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As you know, through Article 17 of the Treaty, the European Union has the obligation to conduct an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches, religious organisations, and philosophical and non-confessional associations. This provision, which entered into force in 2009 with the framework of the Lisbon Treaty, goes far beyond a simple formal or legal obligation. It reflects the idea that the European Union is much more than an economic project, because it concerns people's lives, their dignity, and the realization of the common good.

For this reason, it is essential to consider all dimensions of the individual: certainly the economic one, but also the social, philosophical and spiritual dimensions, which – in my opinion - cannot be reduced to a purely private matter.

Dear President Bettera, Dear all,

We are living in a time marked by profound challenges, rapid transformations and widespread global concerns. We face complex and deeply interconnected issues (from international conflicts and economic instability to technological change, climate pressures and growing social fragmentation). Even though today we are more interconnected than ever, it is not always easy to fully understand the processes and dynamics that are reshaping our societies and influencing our common future.

More than ever, we need dialogue, reconciliation and cooperation. In other words, we must rebuild connections between people, communities and institutions. This requires a collective commitment to breaking down barriers, reducing inequalities and building an inclusive and sustainable "common home."

Promoting the Article 17 dialogue is important not only to strengthen mutual understanding, but also — and I can say this from the perspective of the European Parliament — to consolidate our democracy and improve the decision-making processes.

Through the meetings and seminars we regularly organise, we work to ensure that dialogue does not remain abstract or confined to limited circles, but becomes a living and constructive exchange, capable of offering new perspectives and shared solutions to the concrete problems faced by our societies.

We do not seek confrontation or conflict, but rather a genuine dialogue capable of overcoming divisions, nurturing the European spirit, and contributing to the development of policies for citizens that reflect the common values of our Union.

From this perspective, I truly believe that the European Buddhist Union has made an important contribution over the past years in terms of ideas and proposals.

The theme you have chosen for your Assembly is particularly timely. Respect for the religious rights of Buddhists in Europe points – definitely - to a broader issue: the full protection of freedom of religion or belief, and the capacity of our societies to guarantee inclusion, pluralism and equal dignity for all religious and philosophical communities.

In this regard, Buddhism — with its tradition of dialogue, non-violence, mindfulness and search for harmony — together with the diverse Buddhist communities present across Europe, can offer an important contribution to the construction of more open, inclusive and cohesive societies.

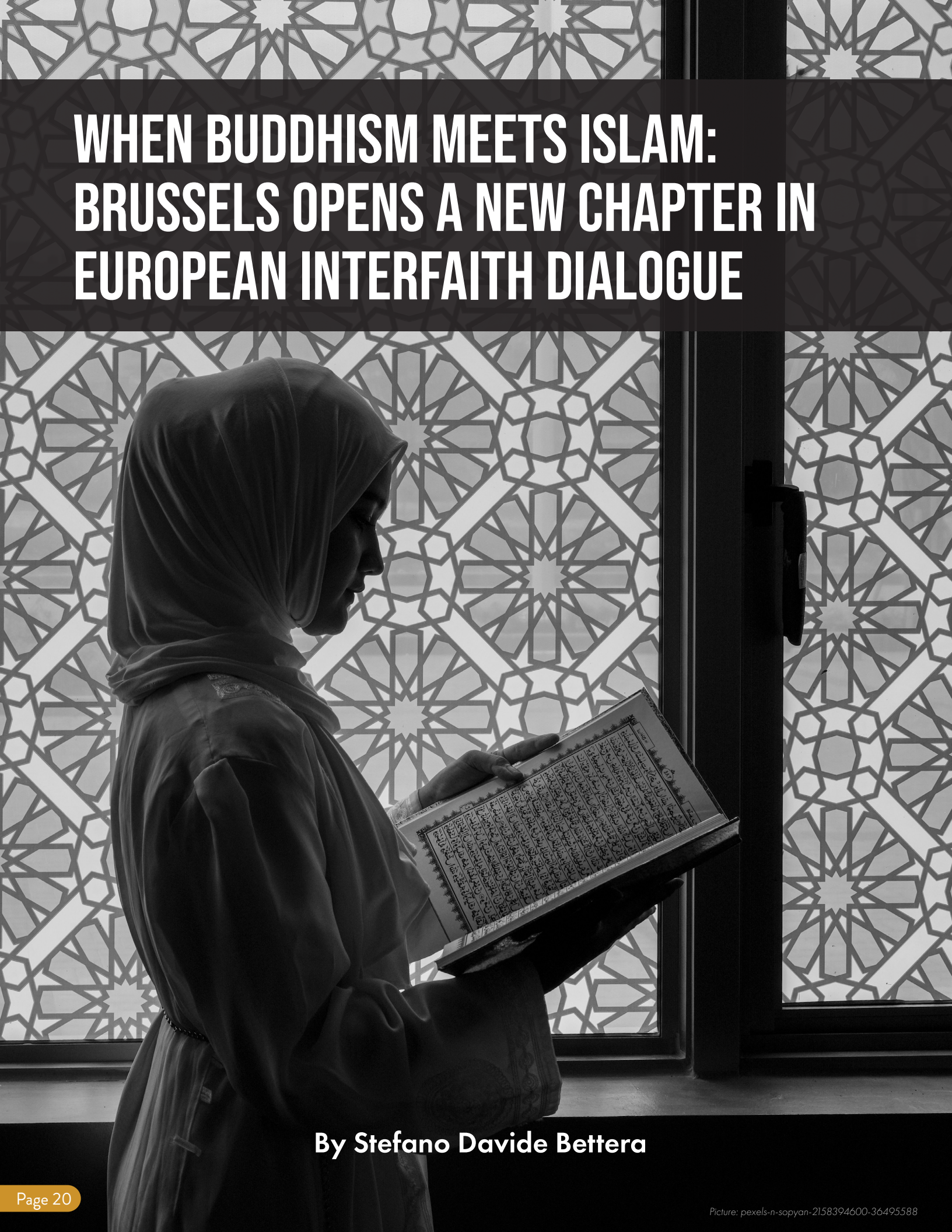
In a context such as the current one, often marked by polarisation and fragmentation, it reminds us of the value of listening, balance, responsibility towards others, and care for the common good.

These are values that can enrich the European public debate and help strengthen that spirit of coexistence and mutual respect of which Europe is particularly in need today, in order to look to the future without losing sight of our shared humanity.

For this reason, I would like to thank you again for your commitment and cooperation, I wish you all a fruitful and inspiring exchange.

Nicola CENSINI

WHEN BUDDHISM MEETS ISLAM: BRUSSELS OPENS A NEW CHAPTER IN EUROPEAN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE



By Stefano Davide Bettera

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At a time marked by identity-based conflicts, geopolitical tensions and growing cultural polarisation, interfaith dialogue remains one of the most valuable instruments for building mutual understanding and fostering peace. It is against this backdrop that the event "***Buddhism Meets Islam***", held on 9 May in Brussels as part of the General Assembly of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) and the celebrations of Vesak—the most important festival in the Buddhist calendar—takes on particular significance.

The initiative is noteworthy not only for its symbolic value but also for its institutional context. It places Buddhist–Muslim dialogue within the framework of European institutions and the activities linked to Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which governs dialogue between EU institutions and religious communities. Earlier in 2026, the European Muslim Leaders Majlis (EULEMA) had already promoted a number of interfaith meetings at the European Parliament involving Christian, Jewish and Buddhist representatives. For the EBU, meanwhile, the event formed part of a broader focus on religious freedom and the rights of Buddhist minorities in Europe, a central theme of its 2026 General Assembly.

From an institutional perspective, the meeting represents one of the first recent examples of structured cooperation between organised European Muslim leadership and the representative bodies of European Buddhism. Its objective is ambitious yet timely: to create a shared platform addressing religious freedom, dialogue and social cohesion within the European context.

Organised with the participation of EULEMA, the gathering brought together Buddhist and Muslim representatives from across Europe to reflect on the contribution religious traditions can make to contemporary society. Beyond its symbolic importance, what makes the meeting particularly remarkable is its innovative nature. Structured dialogue between Buddhism and Islam has been relatively rare in Europe, where interfaith engagement has historically focused on relations between Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

This emphasis has reflected both the continent's religious heritage and the challenges associated with the integration of Muslim communities. Buddhism, although increasingly established and recognised within European societies, has often remained on the margins of these conversations. The Brussels meeting therefore marks a genuine milestone: the beginning of a direct dialogue between two spiritual traditions which, despite emerging from very different geographical and cultural contexts, share aspirations towards peace, compassion, ethical responsibility and the alleviation of human suffering.

The choice of Brussels as the venue was far from accidental. As the heart of European institutions and a crossroads of cultures and worldviews, the Belgian capital provides a uniquely appropriate setting for developing new forms of cooperation among religious communities. In this sense, the dialogue between Buddhism and Islam carries not only a spiritual dimension but also a civic and political one. It is not merely about encouraging mutual understanding; it is ▶

also about contributing to a more inclusive European citizenship grounded in respect for diversity and the appreciation of pluralism.

Participants stressed that authentic dialogue does not require individuals to abandon their convictions. On the contrary, it demands a deeper awareness of one's own spiritual identity. Only those firmly rooted in their own tradition can engage openly with others without fear or prejudice. Seen from this perspective, the encounter between Buddhists and Muslims was not an exercise in religious diplomacy but a practical opportunity to recognise one another as partners capable of sharing common concerns and common responsibilities.

Particular attention was given to issues of religious freedom, human dignity and social cohesion. In increasingly fragmented societies, religious communities can play an important role in fostering relationships based on trust, countering both forms of extremism and the marginalisation of minority groups. Buddhists and Muslims, while representing very different traditions, often share the experience of being religious minorities in European countries and face similar challenges relating to recognition, representation and participation in public life.

The Brussels initiative may therefore mark the beginning of a process that will continue to develop in the years ahead. If dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims has been one of the great laboratories of coexistence in contemporary Europe, engagement between Buddhism and Islam could open a new chapter in interfaith relations, further enriching the culture of pluralism and freedom that lies at the heart of the European project.

At a time when differences are too often perceived as threats, the meeting between Buddhists and Muslims demonstrated an alternative path: one based on mutual understanding, attentive listening and practical cooperation. It is a path that does not seek to erase differences but rather to transform them into opportunities for shared growth. Perhaps this is the most important lesson to emerge from Brussels: the recognition that peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but the capacity to build meaningful relationships among individuals and communities who choose to recognise one another in the common pursuit of the good.



Picture: pexels-ikhlasalfahim-35266858

ebu
European Buddhist Union

EULEMA
EUROPEAN MUSLIM LEADERS MAJLIS

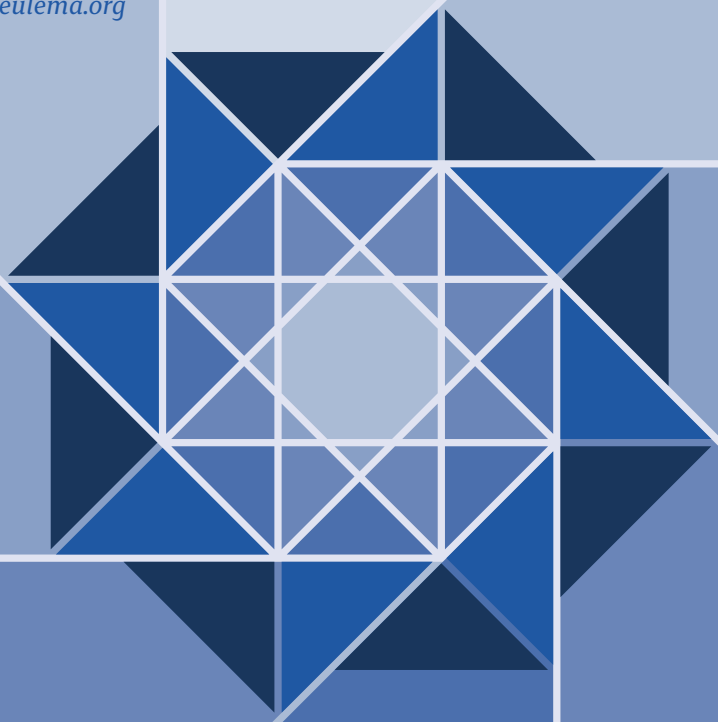
Saturday
May 9th
17:30

Venue:
Hôtel de Ville de Saint-Gilles
Place Van Meenen 39,
1060 Saint-Gilles, Brussels

RSVP info@eulema.org

are glad to invite you to the roundtable

BUDDHISM *meets* ISLAM



Stefano Davide Bettera	*EBU President*
Imam Yahya Pallavicini	*EULEMA Chairman*
Carlo Luyckx	*EBU Vice-President and President of the Buddhist Union of Belgium*
Esma Uçan	*EULEMA Belgium*
Gabriela Frey	*Chair, Committee for Interreligious & interconvictional dialogue, Conference of INGOs, Council of Europe*
Gabor Derecskei	*EULEMA Hungary*
Dharmacharini Munisha	*Member of the Triratna Buddhist Order and EBU Council Member*
Katarzyna Kucharska Louaar	*EULEMA Poland*
Hassan El Bouchttaoui	*President Muslim Council of Belgium*

EUROPEAN BUDDHISTS AND MUSLIMS OPEN A NEW CHAPTER IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Imam Yahya Pallavicini

Vice Presidente, **COREIS** - Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana
www.coreis.it
Chairman, **EULEMA** - European Muslim Leaders Council
www.eulema.org

Picture: pexels-tarnodnahgozar-12439422

A landmark encounter took place in Brussels this spring as representatives of Europe's Buddhist and Muslim communities gathered for what may prove to be a historic moment in interfaith relations on the continent.

The meeting, organised jointly by the European Buddhist Union (EBU) and the European Muslim Leaders Council (EULEMA), brought together religious leaders and scholars from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Hosted in a prestigious venue provided by the City of Brussels, the event coincided with the EBU General Assembly and offered an unprecedented opportunity for dialogue between two spiritual traditions that have rarely engaged one another in a structured European context.

Reflecting on the occasion, Imam Yahya Pallavicini, Vice President of the Italian Islamic Religious Community (COREIS) and Chairman of EULEMA, observed that the organisers may not have fully realised the significance of what they were creating. The practical demands of service, coordination and hospitality perhaps overshadowed the awareness that something both spiritually meaningful and historically significant was taking shape.

The gathering raised important questions. How often have Buddhists and Muslims met in Europe to exchange views in a spirit of mutual respect and learning? What forms of cooperation might emerge from such encounters, and how could they contribute positively to European society? Equally important is the need to ensure that public discussions about Buddhism and Islam are informed by authentic knowledge rather than by ignorance, stereotypes or ideological distortions.

To illuminate the potential of meaningful dialogue across traditions, Pallavicini pointed to the example of the Chinese Muslim scholar Liu Zhi (1660–1739). Liu sought to explain the Five Pillars of Islam through the categories of Confucian moral metaphysics, demonstrating how religious teachings can be communicated across cultural boundaries without compromising their integrity.

According to Liu's interpretation, the profession of faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage guide believers along a path of spiritual return to their original nature. Prayer becomes a journey towards that return; fasting weakens attachment to worldly concerns; almsgiving uproots selfishness; and pilgrimage fulfils the divine command while directing the believer towards ultimate reality. These practices were presented within a broader vision of harmony between heaven, earth and humanity, enriched by the cosmological principles of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements.

Liu's work remains a remarkable example of intellectual openness and cultural translation. Yet, as Pallavicini emphasised, such efforts should never lead to artificial syncretism or confusion between distinct religious traditions. Rather, they demonstrate the possibility of recognising shared spiritual and ethical principles while preserving the integrity of each faith. ▶

In contemporary Europe, this message carries particular relevance. Both Buddhists and Muslims are frequently viewed through the prism of geopolitical conflicts, ideological struggles or historical prejudices. Buddhism is often simplistically associated with China, while Islam is sometimes reduced to the actions of radical movements. Such narratives obscure the reality that millions of Buddhists and Muslims are integral members of European societies.

The Brussels dialogue highlighted a different perspective: Buddhists and Muslims not as outsiders, but as European citizens contributing to the common good. Together, they can help promote a richer understanding of European citizenship—one that fully respects religious pluralism while remaining rooted in shared civic values. Such an approach avoids confusing questions of religious identity with foreign policy, multicultural ideology or anxieties about national sovereignty.

Beyond political considerations, both traditions offer a deeper contribution to contemporary society. They encourage a renewed appreciation of the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of life at a time when aggressive forms of secularism often seek to reduce human existence to purely material concerns. In doing so, they remind Europeans that genuine unity cannot be achieved through uniformity, but through harmony rooted in respect for diversity and transcendent values.

The Brussels encounter between European Buddhists and Muslims may therefore represent more than a successful interfaith event. It may mark the beginning of a broader conversation about spirituality, citizenship and coexistence in twenty-first-century Europe—a conversation grounded in mutual respect and animated by a shared commitment to peace.

As Imam Pallavicini concluded, there remains confidence that the disciplines leading to liberation, enlightenment and true peace will ultimately prevail over the arrogance of those who seek to manipulate minds and souls.

Peace be with you. 🙏

Yahya Pallavicini



Imam of al-Wahid central mosque in Milan. Vice President of COREIS, the Islamic Religious Community of Italy (www.coreis.it). Chairman of EULEMA, the European Muslim Scholars Council (Brussels, www.eulema.org). Advisor for Italian Islam to the Minister of the Interior of the Italian Government from 2005 to 2018, and Ambassador to ICESCO, the Islamic Organisation for Education, Culture and Science (Rabat, 2014 - 2023). Member of the G20 Religion Forum in Italy, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia (2020-2022) and of the WEF World Economic Forum, Global Council on Faith in Action.

Picture YAHYA PALLAVICINI: https://www.coreis.it/rappresentanza-istituzionale/notizia/imam-yahya-pallavicini

Picture below: pexels-ibnulharezmi-9325748









Pictures taken at the AGM.

Dharma in Israel - The Felt Risk to Dharma Values in a Contracting Society



By Tamar Zekbach • Tovana (Israel Insight Society)

Picture: pexels-samir-smier-31491675-30054432

Good afternoon, dear friends and spiritual practitioners of the European Buddhist Union.

I stand before you today representing Tovana, the Israel Insight Society (Tovana is the Hebrew word for insight). First, I wish to express my gratitude for accepting Tovana into the arms and framework of the EBU. As you will hear in the words I'm about to deliver, this comes as a most needed step and encouragement to us, at these times.

Israel is a land currently defined by the sounds of sirens, the weight of grief, and a deep, systemic contraction of the human heart.

When we discuss "Freedom of Religion" in the context of Israel, we encounter a paradox. On paper, and in the eyes of the law, the right of an Israeli to practice Buddhism is not under immediate, direct threat. There are three main reasons for this:

Philosophy over Religion: Most of our thousands of practitioners do not identify as "Buddhist" in a religious sense. Our practice, deriving mainly from the Western secular Dharma that evolved from Theravada traditions from the 1970s onward, sees the Dharma as a transformative human philosophy and a spiritual way of life. Because we don't demand the status of a "recognized religion," we remain largely invisible to the state's religious apparatus.

Institutional Leverage: Israel's democratic institutions, though under immense pressure, still function. Leverage points like the High Court of Justice remain a shield. For years, we hesitated to ask for tax exemptions because the committees were headed by Orthodox Jewish officials; it was only through the legal framework of a democratic state that we could claim our rights.

The Direction of Hate: Currently, the chauvinistic and nationalist tendencies of the state are directed toward the "external" or "internal" enemy within the geopolitical conflict - primarily our Arab neighbors and fellow citizens, whether Christian, Muslim, or secular.

However, I am here to tell you that while our *legal* freedom to sit on a cushion is intact, our *spiritual* freedom to live the values of the Dharma is at a grave, felt risk.

We are witnessing a movement in Israel that is nationalist, militaristic, and increasingly fundamentalist. Because the Dharma teaches that "the other" is not separate from ourselves, our Sangha has found itself in the crosshairs of a culture that now views compassion as "weakness" or even "treason."

The Israeli Sangha has been at the forefront of the struggle against the judicial overhaul, recognizing that without a strong court, there is no protection for the "other." Our practitioners were, and still are, active in the movement to end the war and to free the hostages, in numbers far greater than their proportion in the Israeli population. So the growing risk that we are feeling is not due to what we worship, but because our very worldview acts as a resistance to the narrative of fear and separation.

To understand the gravity of this risk, we must look at the brutal attack that happened just one month ago on a related group, **Israeli Engaged Dharma**. For over a decade, these practitioners have worked in non-violent solidarity with the Palestinian village of Deir Istiya.

Last month, they were attacked by Israeli settlers while securing the villagers' access to their lands. This was a line we have never seen crossed: naked violence directed from Israelis toward other Israelis. It sends a clear message: in a state of contraction, even the "inner" group is not safe if they refuse to hate. ▶

This brings me to the core of our struggle: the inner conditions of our Sangha. We are not a community of monastics living in isolated forests; we are a Sangha of lay practitioners. We are householders, parents, workers, and taxpayers, trying to hold the Dharma while our everyday lives are scorched by the heat of conflict.

1. The Weight of Cumulative Trauma

What we are experiencing now is not a single event, but the intensification of years and years of cumulative trauma. This is a "heart of fire" where the nervous system is never truly at rest. And for the last two and a half years, on top of the actual life-threatening events - a horrible terror attack, missiles, bombs, deadly drones - we also see our country changing, deforming, before our eyes. The fear of what Israel is becoming is often greater than the fear of those external threats.

2. The Burden of Moral Guilt and Shame

As practitioners of *Sila* (ethics), we carry an immense weight of moral guilt and shame. We watch actions being taken in our name, using our resources, that fundamentally contradict the values we sit for on the cushion. How do you find the inner compass and strength to keep telling right from wrong, in such a complex situation? How do you keep your heart open when it is heavy with the shame of what your own collective is doing? This is a unique spiritual "poison" that we must process daily.

3. The Pressure from Outside

Compounding this is a feeling of isolation. We are often attacked from the outside - by the global community or international Sanghas - for "not turning against Israel" or "not doing enough." This creates a painful dissonance: we are already viewed as "internal enemies" by our own society for our activism, yet we are judged by the world for having limited control over a massive, runaway military and political machine. We are caught in a pincer movement of judgment.

4. The Fragility of Secular Faith

Furthermore, our Sangha is pluralistic. We do not follow one single teacher or a religious hierarchy of the kind that can be very helpful in times of confusion. While our pluralism and wide range of teachers is our strength, it also makes our "faith" feel more fragile. Unlike a traditional religious practitioner who may lean on dogma or divine promise, our path requires us to find truth within ourselves, in a society that is actively rejecting that truth. When the external world rejects equality and dialogue, the "lay" practitioner must work twice as hard to keep their internal flame from being extinguished by the wind of the zeitgeist.

Despite these crushing conditions, the Dharma in Israel is thriving. Precisely because the world outside is so harsh, the practice has become a literal life-raft.

We are learning that the practice is the only way to melt the fear and separation that the political climate tries to bake into our bones. Our challenge is to keep the doors of practice open for **everyone** interested in the Dharma, knowing that in a time of war, the words of the Buddha, and the practice itself, are the best remedy for hatred, for fear, for confusion; and that the most radical act of resistance is simply to stay human.

We ask for your solidarity, as spiritual friends who understand that when the heart of one part of the Sangha is in the fire, the whole body feels the heat.

Thank you.

We are learning that the practice is the only way to melt the fear and separation that the political climate tries to bake into our bones. Our challenge is to keep the doors of practice open for <u>everyone</u> interested in the Dharma, knowing that in a time of war, the words of the Buddha, and the practice itself, are the best remedy for hatred, for fear, for confusion; and that the most radical act of resistance is simply to stay human.





Tamar Zekbach is the Managing Director of Tovana (Israel Insight Society) and represents Tovana at the European Buddhist Union (EBU). Holding a background in law, she previously worked in human rights organizations focusing on advocacy and legislation, and managed EU civil society projects in Israel. She has been practicing Dharma since 2003 and is a mother of three.

Picture: pexels-theblackhood-37382695.jpg



DHARMA UNDER SHELLING: OUR TESTIMONY FROM UKRAINE

By Alexandra Xavi

Picture: kateryna-hliznitsova-JVq6vNuvNHM-unsplash.jpg

Picture: This content was generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence, Adobe Firefly prompt: create a pattern of a traditional ukraine dress, long shape, vertical

Denys and **Alexandra**, the speakers of this testimony, lived through the occupations of Mariupol and Bucha. We came to Brussels not as politicians, but as Buddhist practitioners, speaking on behalf of an association of several Buddhist communities of different traditions, which we call **"The Land of the Buddha."**

We came as people who have lived through occupation, displacement, bombardment, persecution, the loss of homes, and the constant presence of death — and who are still trying to preserve Dharma, compassion, awareness, and humanity.

We sincerely thank the European Buddhist Union, its board, and all participants of this conference for giving us the opportunity to speak, and for the support, solidarity, and compassion shown to Ukraine and to Ukrainian Buddhists during these difficult years.

We want to speak about what happens to Buddhist communities when cities are destroyed, people are displaced, teachers die, students disappear, temples and centres are lost, and ordinary life collapses — and when, even then, one must continue to practise.

There is too much to say and too little time. It is impossible to describe everything. But as practitioners, we know that through meditation, compassion, and awareness, we can at least partly touch the suffering of others.

Before speaking further, we invite you into a shared space of peace, compassion, and harmony.

Samantabhadra Dharani:
Atandai tandahadai tandahatei.

Our Community Before the War

Buddhist communities have existed actively in Donetsk since 1996. Together with Kyiv, Donetsk was one of the main centres for the development of Buddhism in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

It was never easy. Buddhist communities faced obstacles with registration, bureaucracy, and unequal conditions for religious organisations. Formally, legal procedures were possible, but in practice small Buddhist communities struggled to compete with larger and more powerful religious structures.

Before 2014, nine Buddhist communities were officially registered in the Donetsk region.

We received support, teachings, and recognition from many masters and traditions, both in Ukraine and abroad: Korean Jogye and Taego orders; Japanese Rinzai and Soto traditions; Chinese Chan and Pure Land masters; Ole Nydahl and his wife; the Karmapa of the Karma Kagyu tradition; Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche of the Dzogchen tradition; and Patrul Rinpoche of the Nyingma tradition.

There were many traditions, forms, and methods. But for us the foundation was always the same: Buddha Dharma, practice, compassion, and the path of liberation from suffering.

2014: The First Loss of Home

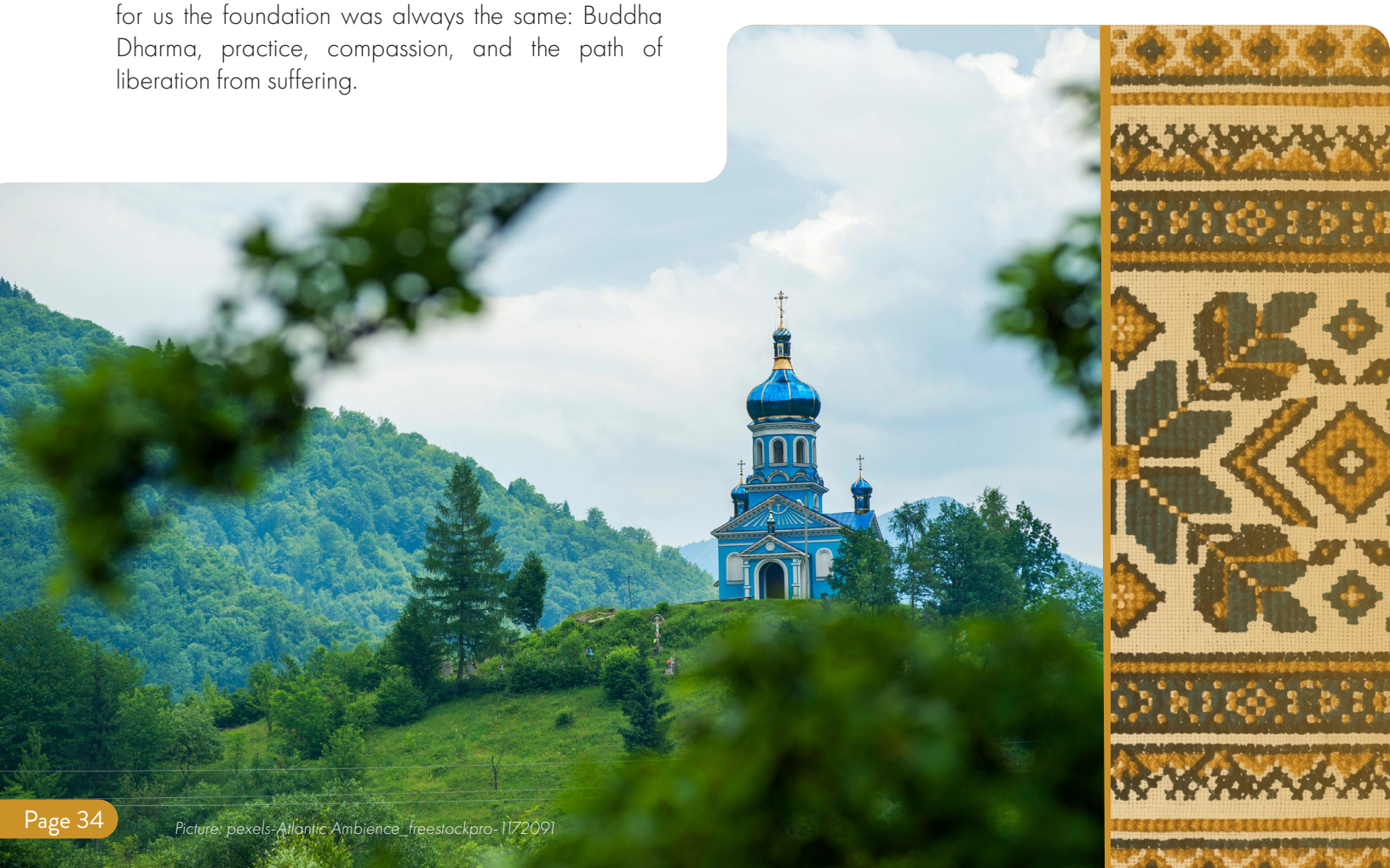
When Russia began its aggression against Ukraine in 2014, many of our communities were forced to relocate. Some practitioners stayed in Donetsk. Contact with some of them was lost, and their fate is still unknown.

In the occupied territories, many religious communities came under pressure or were practically banned. Religious figures were arrested. People were intimidated. Some went through imprisonment, torture, or disappearance.

The Sheichen Ling monastery of the Nyingma tradition was destroyed. Its leader, Dorje Zhambo, died on Ukrainian territory after what we believe was a fabricated case.

After 2014, several of our groups settled in Mariupol and Sviatohirsk. Others scattered around the world. Among us were practitioners of Zen, Dzogchen, Gelug, Vajrayana, Mahamudra, and Nyingma.

Different communities, different directions, different forms of practice — but in general, **Ekayana**: one vehicle, one path.



Picture: pexels-Atlantic Ambience_freestockpro-1172091

Mariupol, 2022: Practice in Hell

In February 2022, the full-scale invasion began. The core of our community found itself under occupation in Mariupol.

We survived cold, hunger, exhaustion, shelling, bombings, and the constant presence of death.

We share these stories not to shock, but to help others understand what people went through — and how the practice of Buddha Dharma helped us survive.

Today, Mariupol is mentioned much less often. Perhaps this topic is uncomfortable for many people. According to our feelings and testimonies, tens of thousands of civilians may have died there. We believe the real number of deaths may reach around 100,000 people out of a population of about 650,000.

The city became a place of enormous suffering.

Among those who died were Dharma teachers and coaches of children's centres and clubs:

Hlib Voievudko
Vladyslav Zykov
Asya Behliarova
Denys Blokhin
Maksym Svietlov

We remember them in silence.



Alexandra and **Denys** at the **AGM**

What We Saw

A rocket or powerful air bomb hit a nearby nine-storey building with six entrances. The whole building collapsed instantly. The ground shook. Nobody survived.

Death came instantly, just as it did in the Mariupol Drama Theatre.

Even now, it is difficult to walk past that place. The breath of death is still felt there. People become silent without noticing it. Even children who remained under occupation almost never smile.

When the Ksitigarbha mantra was chanted there, it seemed as if phantom images of the dead appeared in the air.

In another place, a rocket launcher missile hit the upper floors of a building. A husband and wife screamed in pain while burning alive. It was impossible to save them physically, so we offered the Amitabha Buddha mantra.

May they have a better rebirth.

The neighbours who heard their screams, and breathed the smell of burned air, later could not look into each other's eyes. Everyone silently shared compassion.

The conditions were extremely harsh: eight degrees below zero at night, unsanitary conditions, dust, soot, exhaust fumes from tanks and gunfire, constant cold, and almost no normal sleep. It was difficult to move and almost impossible to lie down. Most people only sat. Feet stayed in shoes almost all the time. People and animals slowly began to lose their minds. Most people looked like living dead. Everyone had altered states of consciousness.

Only awareness, complete acceptance, helping others, memory of Refuge, and the understanding that much still had to be done for the development of Buddha Dharma helped us continue.

Meditation without meditation.

Listening to spontaneous Wisdom.

How We Practise During War

In our experience, during active combat it is almost impossible to practise classical meditation.

What remains is awareness in simple things: empty mind, emptiness of feelings, emptiness of bodies.

The paired practice of compassion and wisdom mantras becomes appropriate. Sometimes you say a mantra only once in your mind and then run, looking around for soldiers, mines, and incoming fire.

Interaction with others is extremely important for survival. We remember the Precious Treasures. We think about the meaning of life. We let everything go — both right and wrong. We try to see how higher consciousness guides us through trials.

We keep neutral equanimity, because otherwise it is impossible to pass through such tests. The nervous system cannot endure the pain and emotions without it.

We feel love for those close to us. We practise Dharani, body heat yoga, qigong, and dream practice, erasing the boundaries between sleep and reality.

And we practise limitless patience — simply enduring hardship and suffering, up to the patience of unborn dharmas.

Dharani of Innumerable Meanings:
Om, Rin-ra, Aan-man-mae, Budhagatae.

What We Have Lost

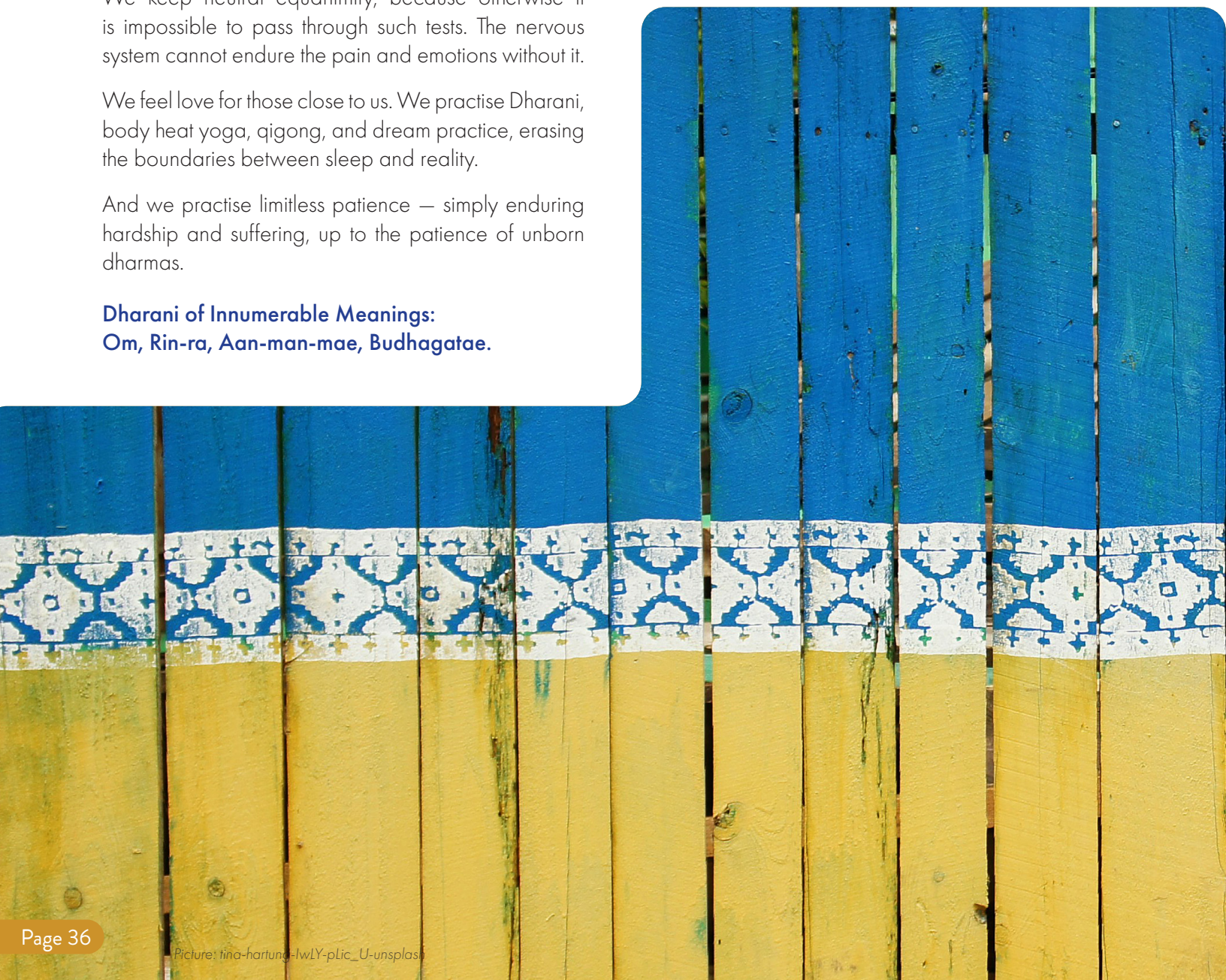
Since 2014, the Donetsk Buddhist community has been one of the Buddhist communities most affected by the war.

We lost two retreat centres, two wellness centres, two sports centres, apartments, cars, places of practice, and the material foundation built over many years.

One Dharma teacher died together with his wife. Three of our fellow Dharma students died in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Some disappeared without a trace.

Even without counting moral damage, the material losses are tens of millions of euros.

But how can broken lives be counted?



Picture: tina-hartung-IwLY-pLic_U-unsplash

Spiritual People Without Protection

One of our biggest problems is forced mobilisation and the lack of proper protection for spiritual people. Although international law gives special protection to clergy and religious personnel, in practice this is often ignored.

Denys, who is speaking here today, should have been exempt from mobilisation because of health issues, but this was ignored. He was detained, beaten, had one tooth broken, and was sent to a military unit after documents were processed with violations.

He explained that he is a Buddhist, a teacher, and the leader of a place of the Way.

They only laughed at him.

But Denys kept a clear mind. His wife went through offices, worked with a lawyer, and challenged the illegal actions. We prayed for his fate. Almost miraculously, he was released.

The Problems We Face Today

Our communities now face several serious problems.

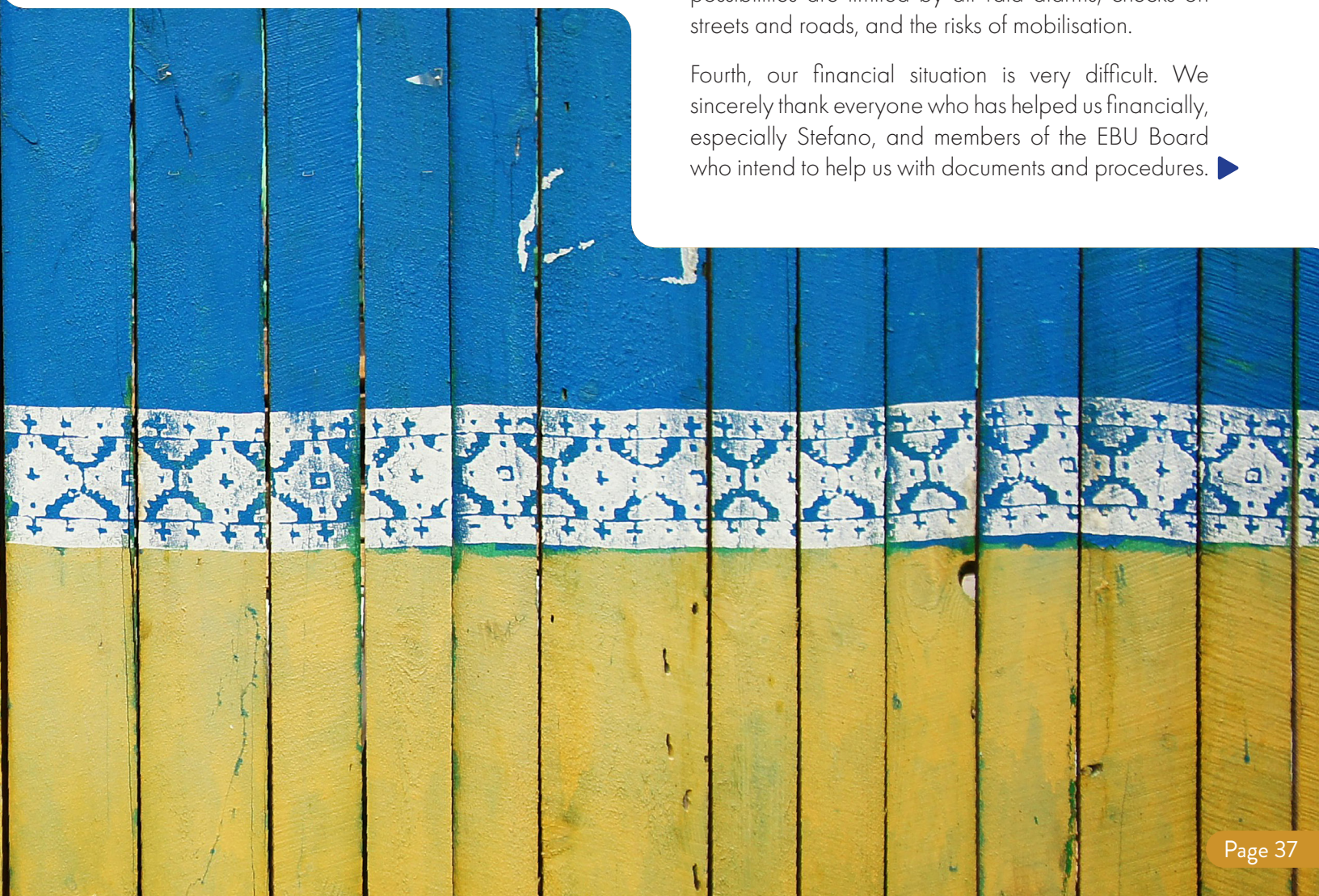
First, we need protection from repression and mobilisation. The lack of proper protection for spiritual people and religious leaders remains one of the most painful unresolved issues.

Second, many people who left Ukraine are stuck in adaptation. Some moved away from Buddha Dharma. Some, because of pain, trauma, and loss of support, even turned against their teachers and communities. We try to help those who remain in contact with us find Buddhist centres nearby, but almost everyone carries deep stress from the loss of their past life.

Third, those who stayed in Ukraine are exhausted. War brings constant fatigue: shelling, destruction, energy crises, lack of medicine, reduced access to food, and mass suffering. The mental condition of many people is extremely heavy.

We work with this as much as we can, but our possibilities are limited by air raid alarms, checks on streets and roads, and the risks of mobilisation.

Fourth, our financial situation is very difficult. We sincerely thank everyone who has helped us financially, especially Stefano, and members of the EBU Board who intend to help us with documents and procedures.



Prisoners and Victims

We ask you to pray for **Dmytro Shurda**, born in 1972, a children's boxing coach, boxing judge, Buddhist, and native of Mariupol. Since 2022, he has been in captivity. He survived a heart attack caused by torture and abuse. We pray for his release through exchange.

We also ask you to pray for **Kyryl Zaichenko**, a young man from Mariupol. From 2022 until 2025, he was in captivity. He has now been exchanged, but he has serious injuries. His leg was badly damaged. After eight months of rehabilitation, part of the leg was removed and became shorter, but it still continues to rot. There is a risk of losing the leg up to the knee. He moves in a wheelchair or on crutches. His disability pension is less than 100 euros, and while doctors are free, medicine must be bought.

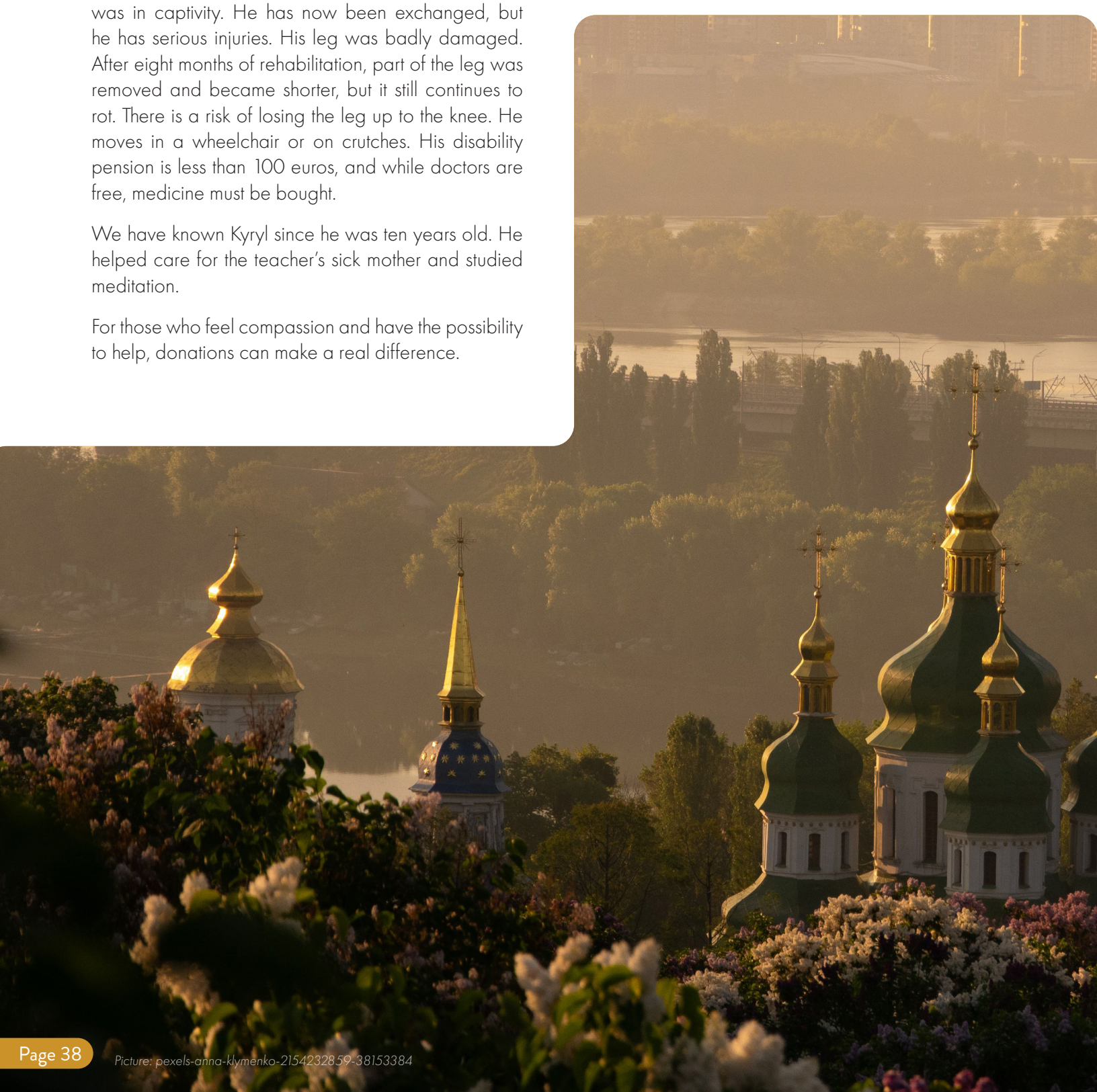
We have known Kyryl since he was ten years old. He helped care for the teacher's sick mother and studied meditation.

For those who feel compassion and have the possibility to help, donations can make a real difference.

Bureaucratic Barriers

Buddhist communities that left the occupied parts of Ukraine also face difficulties inside the country: problems with registration, lack of compensation for damages, and long bureaucratic procedures.

We continue to write appeals and letters, but so far without significant results.



Picture: pexels-anna-klymenko-2154232859-38153384

What We Continue to Do

Despite everything, we continue our work.

We send food, medicine, meals, and energy equipment to families most in need, especially large families. We participate in humanitarian projects, help feed victims, and take part in funeral ceremonies and burials.

We support recovery through education, practice, retreats when possible, rehabilitation after injuries and captivity, psychiatric and psychological support, civil rights work, social media, and summer educational programmes for teenagers.

We also continue Buddhist cultural and literary work: drawings, mandalas, translation, design, and printing of Buddhist literature.

Internationally, we participate in events in Malaysia, hold retreats and online classes with the Grand Patriarch of the Korean Buddhist Taego Order, Rev. Dr. Jongmae Kenneth Park, build connections with Zen.nl, meet online with communities including Zen masters of the Kwan Um school, join meditations, conferences, cultural events, and publish in **Buddhismus Aktuell.**

We continue to develop international connections between Buddhist communities.

Why We Speak

Today you have heard only part of what Ukrainian Buddhists have gone through.

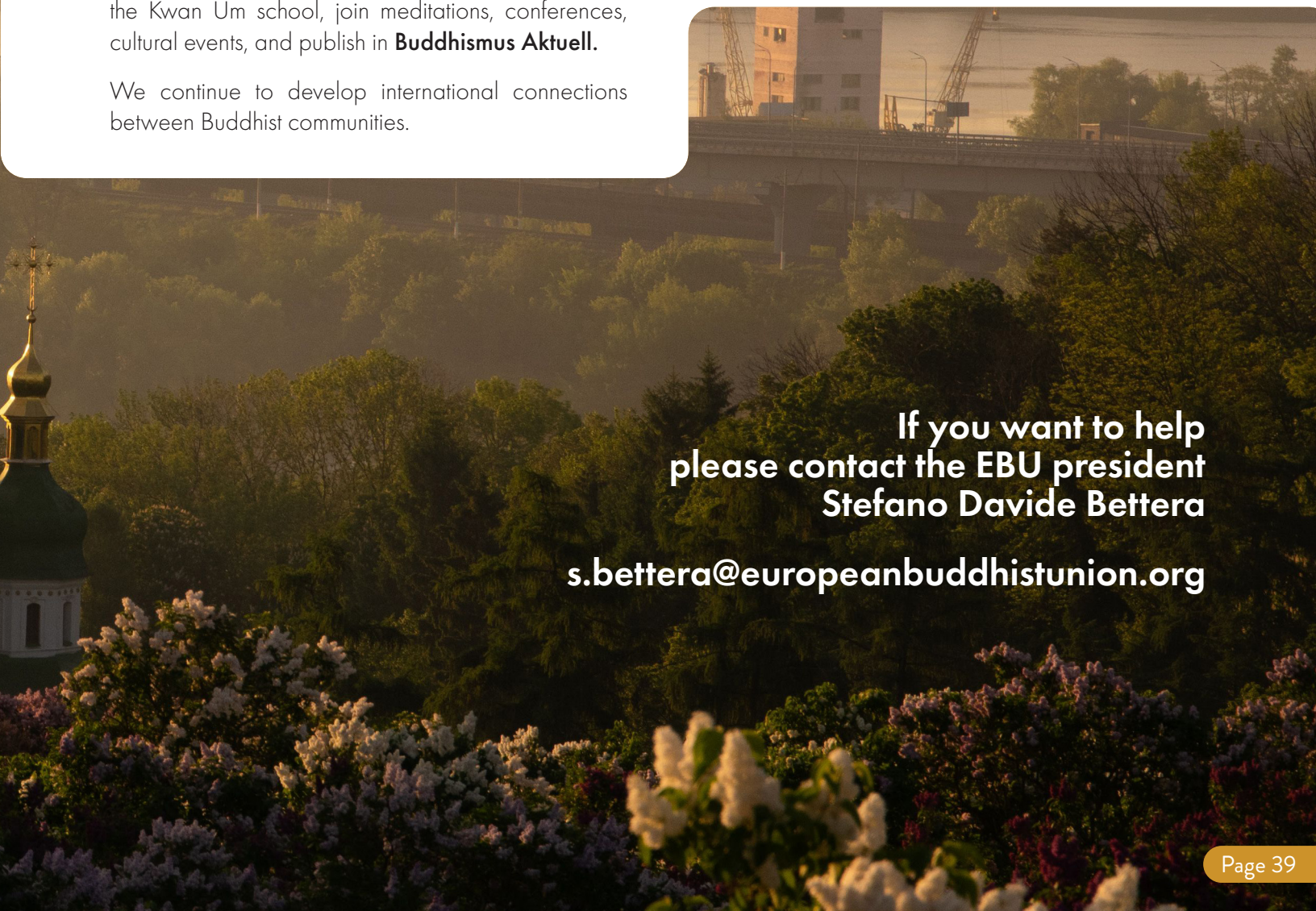
How do we see these trials? Perhaps they are strengthening us for the work of Dharma — not only for Ukraine, but for all of Europe, and perhaps even for the world.

We share this experience to support people, strengthen consciousness, and inspire deeper and more determined Dharma practice.

Because practice, compassion, and awareness can help prevent wars and build peaceful relations between people and countries.

Thank you for your attention. Thank you for your compassion. Thank you for your understanding.

Namo Buddha. Namo Dharma. Namo Sangha.



If you want to help
please contact the EBU president
Stefano Davide Bettera

s.bettera@europeanbuddhistunion.org



Freedom of Religion or Belief for Buddhists in Hungary: Recognition, Education, and Institutional Challenges

By Gábor Karsai
Rector, Dharma Gate Buddhist College, Hungary

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Freedom of religion or belief is not limited to the private freedom to hold spiritual views. It also includes the right to practise, teach, transmit traditions, organise communities, create institutions, educate future generations, and participate in public life. For minority religions such as Buddhism, this freedom becomes meaningful only when legal rights are supported by fair institutional conditions. Buddhism in Hungary is generally accepted and legally protected, yet its religious rights are unevenly realised because of structural differences in legal status, recognition, funding, and institutional stability.

Hungary's Fundamental Law guarantees freedom of conscience and religion and allows cooperation between the state and religious communities. In principle, this creates space for partnership. In practice, however, the Hungarian system differentiates between religious communities according to their legal status. The 2011 Church Law was a major turning point. It reduced the number of recognised churches and introduced a system in which full recognition became dependent on parliamentary decision. Many previously recognised communities lost their status, and newer or smaller religious groups were placed in less privileged legal categories.

For Buddhists, this has not meant persecution. Buddhist communities can generally gather, practise, teach meditation and philosophy, maintain centres, publish, organise retreats, and take part in public life. Buddhism also enjoys a largely positive social image in Hungary: it is often associated with peace, wisdom, meditation, philosophy, and compatibility with modern life. However, this positive image can hide the fact that Buddhism is a full religious tradition with serious institutional needs. It requires legal recognition, stable funding, trained teachers, educational structures, community spaces, and the ability to transmit its practices across generations.

The Buddhist landscape in Hungary is diverse. It includes Tibetan, Zen, Theravāda, and modern global Buddhist movements. Some Buddhist communities have recognised church status, while others function as religious associations. This creates a layered system in which not all Buddhist communities have the same access to public recognition, funding, and long-term institutional development. In 2026 Hungary has five recognised Buddhist churches and around twenty registered Buddhist associations.

Dharma Gate Buddhist Church and Dharma Gate Buddhist College show both the possibilities and the tensions of this situation. Founded in 1991, shortly after Hungary's democratic transition, Dharma Gate Buddhist Church was created as an umbrella organisation for different Buddhist groups. Its aim was to support the study, practice, and sharing of the Dharma, and to establish a Buddhist institution of higher education. Dharma Gate Buddhist College, also founded in 1991, later became a state-accredited and state-financed Buddhist higher education institution within Hungary's system of faith-based higher education. ▶

The existence of Dharma Gate Buddhist College is a major example of Buddhist religious rights in practice. It demonstrates that a minority religious tradition can build a recognised educational institution, train students, develop teachers, support Buddhist religious education, and contribute to society. The College offers BA and MA degrees in Buddhist Dharma and combines academic study with contemplative practice. Its non-sectarian curriculum includes Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, while also addressing applied Buddhism, social engagement, ethics, meditation, and contemporary forms of knowledge.

Education is therefore presented as one of the most important dimensions of religious freedom. A community's freedom is not fully protected if it can only practise privately but cannot educate, train future leaders, or sustain institutions. In this sense, Dharma Gate Buddhist College strengthens the resilience of Buddhism in Hungary and gives Buddhist communities a public, intellectual, and social role.

At the same time, Buddhist religious rights in Hungary remain fragile in several respects. The main challenges are legal ambiguity, political dependency in recognition, unequal access to funding, and fragmentation within the Buddhist community. The Hungarian 1% tax offering system provides one form of support and shows growing public sympathy for Buddhist organisations, but broader public funding and institutional opportunities are still closely connected to recognised church status.

The Hungarian case therefore reveals a gap between formal freedom and lived equality. Buddhists are free, but not all Buddhist communities enjoy the same institutional conditions. The issue is not open repression, but structural inequality. Freedom of religion or belief must therefore be understood not only as tolerance, but as the creation of fair conditions in which minority religious traditions can flourish.

I conclude that Hungary offers a wider European lesson. Across Europe, minority religions face similar challenges: legal diversity, unequal recognition, dependence on state structures, and the need to prove their public value. For Buddhists in Hungary, the future of religious freedom will depend on transparent and non-political recognition procedures, fair access to funding, protection of minority religious education, and sustained dialogue between the state and religious communities.

Ultimately, Buddhist religious freedom in Hungary exists, but it is unevenly realised. The task is to move from formal acceptance toward genuine institutional equality, so that Buddhist communities can transmit wisdom, cultivate compassion, educate future generations, and contribute fully to Hungarian and European society.



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Gabor Karsai is Rector and Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Dharma Gate Buddhist College in Budapest, Hungary. He also serves as Managing Director of Mind & Life Europe based in Switzerland. He specialised in and studies the intersections of process philosophy (A. N. Whitehead), the enactive approach of cognitive science (F. Varela, E. Thompson et al.), phenomenology and Buddhist philosophy. He is also doing research on Engaged Buddhism and the social implications of Buddhism. Over the last 20 years, he has had extensive management engagements as CEO of philanthropic enterprises and non-for-profit organizations in the fields of leadership development, education, interfaith and science-spirituality dialogues in Hungary, Iceland, Switzerland and Taiwan.

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DIGITAL FAIRNESS BY DESIGN: REGULATING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR HUMAN WELL-BEING



By Stefano Davide Bettera

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When discussing the digital transformation, public debate tends to focus on technological innovation, artificial intelligence, economic competitiveness, or data security. All of these are undeniably important. Yet today we are called upon to address an even more fundamental question:

HOW CAN WE DESIGN AND REGULATE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS SO THAT THEY GENUINELY SERVE HUMAN WELL-BEING?

This is precisely the perspective invited by the theme of this conference. The challenge is not simply to mitigate the harmful consequences of technology after they have emerged, but rather to embed principles of fairness, transparency and accountability into the architecture of digital ecosystems from the outset.

Digital platforms are no longer neutral tools. They shape the way we access information, communicate, work, participate in democratic life and even construct our personal identities. Algorithms determine the information we encounter, influence our decisions and increasingly contribute to shaping our understanding of reality.

For this reason, the regulation of digital environments cannot be approached solely as a technical or economic matter. At its heart, it is an ethical and anthropological question. We must ask ourselves what vision of the human person is being advanced through the technologies we develop and deploy. It is precisely here that the contribution of religious traditions becomes indispensable.

This reflection has become even more urgent with the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT, Claude and other large language models. These technologies offer extraordinary opportunities for knowledge creation, creativity and productivity. At the same time, however, they introduce profound new risks that cannot be ignored.

Among the most significant concerns is the growing ability of artificial intelligence to personalise information with unprecedented sophistication. A system capable of understanding an individual's preferences, emotions, beliefs and vulnerabilities can become an exceptionally powerful instrument of influence. The challenge is no longer limited to conventional disinformation; rather, it lies in the capacity to generate messages perfectly tailored to each individual, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish legitimate persuasion from subtle manipulation.

An equally significant, though less frequently discussed, danger concerns the emergence of new forms of psychological dependency. Digital platforms are already designed to capture attention and maximise user engagement. Generative AI has the potential to intensify this dynamic to an unprecedented degree. Always-available virtual assistants, artificial interlocutors capable of simulating empathy, and systems able to provide immediate, highly personalised responses may encourage some individuals to develop emotional and cognitive dependence on technology itself.

When people begin to entrust an artificial system with their decisions, their interpretation of reality or even their need for recognition and reassurance, the issue ceases to be merely technological. It becomes a question that touches directly upon human freedom. The real danger is not simply technological, but cultural and spiritual: the gradual erosion of critical thinking, independent judgement and personal responsibility.

The manipulation of opinion does not necessarily occur through coercion. More often, it operates in far subtler ways, through the construction of digital environments that gradually shape preferences, beliefs and behaviour without individuals being fully aware of the influence being exerted upon them. This

is why algorithmic transparency and the protection of cognitive autonomy should become central objectives of public policy.

In this context, public institutions bear a fundamental responsibility. European legislation adopted in recent years has made significant progress in promoting greater transparency and accountability among digital platforms. Yet regulation alone is not enough. No legislative framework, however sophisticated, can substitute for a culture of shared responsibility.

This is where religious communities can make a distinctive contribution. The world's great religious traditions preserve centuries of reflection on human nature, interpersonal relationships, freedom and our responsibility towards others. At a time when technological debate risks becoming dominated by considerations of efficiency alone, religious voices remind us that the human being cannot be reduced to a collection of data points, measurable preferences or predictable patterns of behaviour.

Religious traditions can also contribute to the development of a genuine form of **digital ethical literacy**, equipping individuals with the critical capacities, discernment and self-awareness needed to navigate increasingly complex digital environments. In an age characterised by an uninterrupted flow of information, the challenge is no longer simply to gain access to content, but to interpret it wisely, evaluate it critically and place it within its proper context.

A second consideration is equally important. The rapid progress of artificial intelligence inspires both enthusiasm and profound questions. Machines are becoming increasingly sophisticated. They learn, analyse and generate content with remarkable speed and accuracy. Yet we must avoid one fundamental misunderstanding: artificial intelligence does not possess consciousness—least of all an awareness of its own limitations. In a very real sense, unlike human beings, it is not constrained by mortality.

Human consciousness remains something qualitatively distinct and fundamentally superior. It encompasses far more than the capacity to process information. It includes self-awareness, moral responsibility, empathy, the ability to attribute meaning to experience, and the uniquely human capacity to reflect upon questions of good and evil.

We may legitimately delegate many tasks to technological systems, but ethical judgement cannot be delegated to machines. Algorithms can assist us in addressing increasingly complex decisions, yet ultimate responsibility must always remain with human beings. A society that loses sight of this distinction risks undermining the very foundations of its own freedom.

For this reason, the principle of **Digital Fairness by Design** must be accompanied by an equally important principle: the primacy of the human person. Technology should expand human possibilities rather than replace human judgement; it should strengthen freedom rather than diminish it; it should reinforce communities rather than fragment them.

Ultimately, the defining challenge of our age is not to choose between technology and humanity. Rather, it is to ensure that digital environments are consciously designed in the service of human flourishing. This requires a holistic understanding of development—one that places human dignity at the centre of innovation, recognises the enduring value of communities and of our cultural and spiritual traditions, and affirms with clarity that technological progress finds its true purpose only when it serves the common good.



Stefano Davide Bettera
European Buddhist Union
President



Stefano Davide Bettera is a writer, philosopher and journalist. He alternates his work as an author with teaching.

For more information: www.stefanobettera.com

ARTICLE 17 TFEU

Dialogue with churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations

European Parliament

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Communities tackling isolation and digital risks



Tuesday, 9 June 2026

15:00 – 18:30

SPINELLI 1E2

Hosted by:

Antonella Sberna

Vice-President

Responsible for the Article 17 Dialogue

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Final Editing:
Emilia Amalā Raunio
Stefano Davide Bettera
Ron Eichhorn

Graphic Design:
Noemi Carmona Laan
www.numydesigns.com

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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.

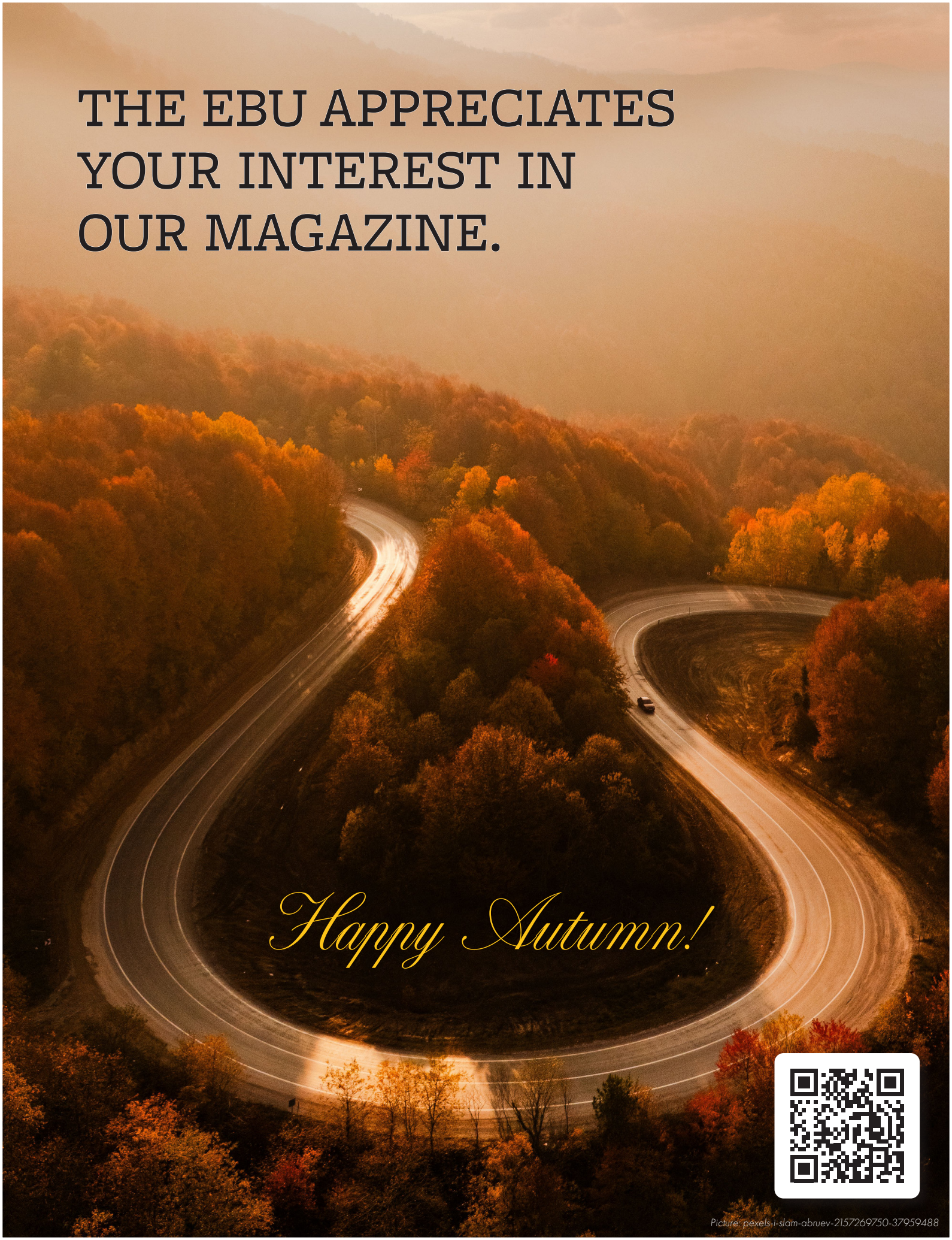
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