

Enabling pluralism to work through a civil public square

Across Europe, society is increasingly diverse. Many love the variety of cultures, languages and ethnicities they hear and see. Even more welcome the huge choice of foreign cuisines they can enjoy, at least in their nation's cities. However, some feel that "home" is not home anymore because there is too much change and difference. And probably a majority sense some discomfort when they listen to those with strong but very different political, faith and worldview perspectives to theirs. Wherever people are on the political spectrum, their discomfort can spill over into social media outrage, community tension and the desire to condemn, silence or exclude.

These clashes and tensions are pulling us further away from each other and should not be ignored. Diversity is not going to go away. Attempts to enforce conformity through silencing "the other" are wrong, and will not work anyway. We have to find a way of living together with our deepest differences. At local, national and continental level.

How do we value growing diversity of worldview and faith and not expect people to believe, think and behave as we do? How do we respond to expressions that are quite far removed from our own positions? Freedom of expression is a precious human right but how to tolerate or even engage people who are 'different'? Do we even want to?

The Global Charter of Conscience advocates for a civil public square. Indeed, as EEA we don't just think it is a "nice idea" but an essential one if our diverse and plural societies are to flourish.

A civil public square is a vision for society where everyone of any or no faith can be themselves, live according to their belief or worldview and also argue robustly with others. BUT they also accept the responsibility of recognising, respecting and defending the freedom of religion or belief and expression of others.

Civility doesn't mean conformity or suppression of disagreement. Religious beliefs and secular worldviews are too varied. We will not agree with one another on everything! Civility means ensuring everyone's freedom to express their beliefs.

Belief is unlimited, religious and worldview practice has some limits when it impinges on others. But limits should be exceptional, and only when absolutely necessary.

In 2012, the European Evangelical Alliance launched the [Global Charter of Conscience](#), a document which explains how freedom of religion or belief is at the core of human flourishing and how the cultivation of civility through education and the construction of a civil public square makes it possible for us to live together with our deepest differences.

We commend the vision of a civil public square and the Global Charter of Conscience to all.