

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002046/24
to the Commission
Nikolaos Anadiotis (NI)
(14 October 2024)**

Subject: Vandalism of Orthodox sacred religious sites in Greece

In 2014, the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports issued its first report on the 3 390 cases of vandalism against religious sites in Greece ⁽¹⁾, a trend that is rapidly rising. Indeed, cases of vandalism in 2022 quadrupled compared to 2015. What is even more striking is the spike in recorded acts of violence against the Orthodox Church and the desecration of Greek Orthodox churches. As many as 95.72% of these attacks were targeted against the Orthodox Church, 1.74% against Judaism, 1.18% against Islam and less than 0.5% against other religions.

The acts of violence in question include vandalism, break-ins, theft, burglaries, sacrilege, grave robbing, arson and other forms of desecration.

Given that the spike in religious intolerance was discussed during the Plenary debate on 10 October 2024, can the Commission answer the following:

How does it plan to help Member States tackle hate crimes and acts of vandalism against places of religious worship, ensuring that the EU's values of religious freedom and safety are respected?

Submitted: 14.10.2024

**Answer given by Mr McGrath on behalf of the European Commission
(9 January 2025)**

Freedom of religion is protected under Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. However, according to Article 51 of the Charter, the provisions of the Charter are addressed to the Member States only when they are implementing EU law.

In this context, the Commission is committed to protecting Christians and members of other religious groups from persecution inside and outside the EU.

The EU has clear rules in place to address racism and intolerance, including hate crime and hate speech ⁽¹⁾. To prevent and counter the spread of illegal hate speech online, the Commission agreed in 2016 with major IT companies on a 'Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online' ⁽²⁾, which is to become a code of conduct within the meaning of Article 45 of the Digital Services Act ⁽³⁾, as part of the broader due diligence obligations aiming to tackle the dissemination of illegal content online provided for in that regulation.

The Commission has also taken steps to protect places of worship. While the implementation of security measures remains primarily a national competence, the Commission provides support to improve the protection of places of worship in cooperation with religious communities.

The Commission provides targeted funding to support Member States in their efforts to protect places of worship and religious communities, mainly via the Internal Security Fund. The 2022 funding call provided EUR 8.3 million of funding in the realm of protection of places of worship.

Out of the five projects awarded, two included consortium members from Greece, such as law enforcement agencies and faith organisations.

¹ https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2023/gen_gram_thrisk/%CE%88%CE%BA%CE%B8%CE%B5%CF%83%CE%B7%202022.pdf

⁽¹⁾ Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.

⁽²⁾ The aim of the 'Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online' is to prompt platforms to react swiftly to hate speech notices by users and remove the content when necessary. The Code also aims to foster cooperation among IT companies, civil society organisations and public authorities, e.g. on counter speech (see details under: https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=54300)

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>).