
Denmark: draft law introducing obligation to translate homilies and sermons into Danish. Card. Hollerich (COMECE), “erosion of religious freedom”

An “undue hindrance” to “the fundamental right to freedom of religion”: according to Jean-Claude Hollerich, President of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), that would be the effect of the draft law that the Danish Government intends to put forward which would require all sermons, homilies and other speeches made in a religious (liturgical) context to either be delivered in Danish or made available in Danish. While “respecting” national processes, the archbishop sees this proposal with “preoccupation” and places it into “a broader, increasing trend of neglecting the fundamental right to freedom of religion in the EU Member States, and even at the EU Court’s level”. The “extremely rigid national measures imposed on Churches and religious communities with regard to religious ceremonies, in view of Covid-19” would also reflect this trend. According to the archbishop, this is an erosion of “specific rights” which “endangers the whole architecture of fundamental rights, based on the idea of universality and interconnectedness of rights”. If the goal of the Danish draft legislation is “to prevent radicalization and counter incitement to hatred and terrorism, any negative or discriminatory impact should be avoided with regard to Churches and religious communities that are averse and alien to such actions, acting in a spirit of peace and integration”, the archbishop continues. All the more so because smaller religious denominations “not only do not have the financial means to comply but are often formed of immigrant communities”. Moreover, when devising anti-radicalization and anti-terrorism policies, Member States should take into account that the EU Counter-terrorism agenda itself underlines that “freedom of religion is among the foundations of the European Union”. The statement expresses solidarity with the Scandinavian Bishops’ Conference and the affected communities in Denmark, while also encouraging “an intense and fruitful dialogue” of the public authorities with Churches and religious communities.

Valentina Bombelli