

DECEMBER 2024

ISSUE #2

PROTONE PROJECT Newsletter



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PROTECT THE PLACES OF WORSHIP

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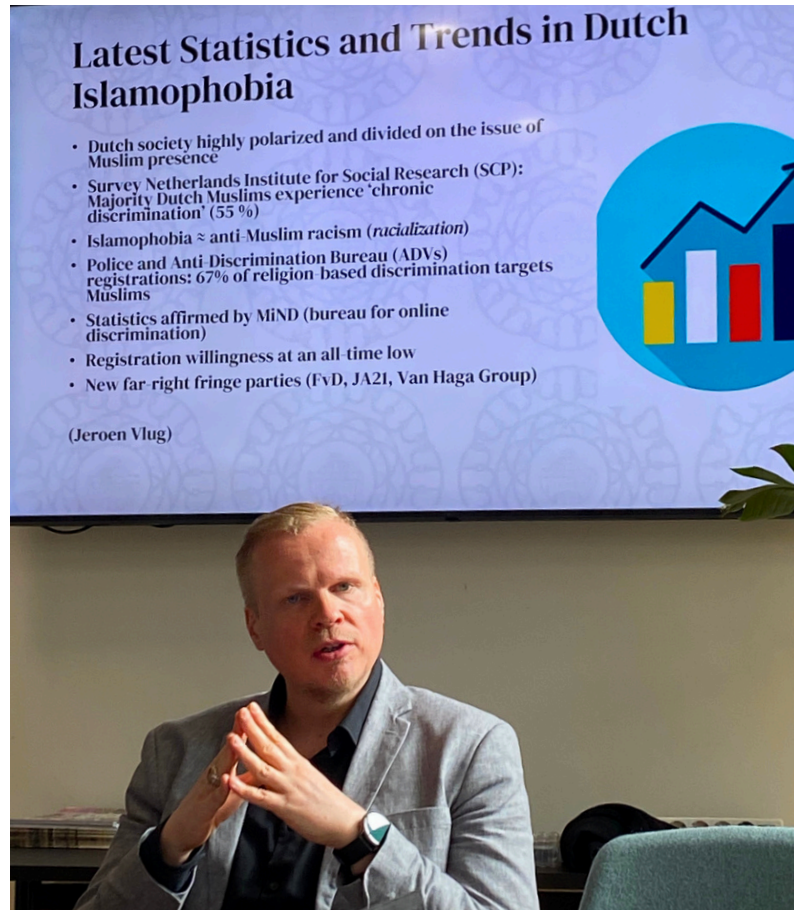
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Co-funded by
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TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR FAITH LEADERS, HEADS OF PLACES OF WORSHIP AND CONSORTIUM ORGANISATIONS' STAFF

Last April 2024, The Protone Project concluded a series of three **training sessions** aimed to equip faith leaders, worshippers, and consortium staff with the tools to enhance security at places of worship. Over a three-month period, participants were introduced to **key security concepts, risk assessment techniques, and collaborative strategies involving faith leaders, civil society organisations, and researchers**. The sessions, **led by Leiden University and Istituto Tevere**, combined insights from security management with interfaith collaboration.

The programme focused heavily on conducting **risk assessments**, covering environmental, technical, and behavioural aspects. Participants were guided through critical questions addressing the **security needs** of worshippers and potential threats to places of worship, such as legal challenges, public attitudes, and emergency responses.

Additionally, Prof. Arnold Mol from the Islamic University of Applied Sciences in Rotterdam delivered a special session on the **evolving identities of Muslims in the Netherlands**, exploring the impact of Islamophobia and changing perceptions within multicultural societies.

The training achieved four main objectives: empowering participants as advocates for worship security, familiarising them with the legal aspects of protection, facilitating knowledge exchange among experts, and providing concrete tools for local-level workshops.

VIDEOS ABOUT THE PROTECTION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP IN EUROPE



In this video we examine the security challenges faced by places of worship across Europe. From cyber threats to physical attacks, experts discuss the common risks and incidents targeting synagogues, mosques, and churches. We explore the differences and similarities between security models in Germany and the UK, the impact of technological advancements, and the unique challenges faced by religious communities. Join **Paul Weller**, **Arnold Mol**, and **Aitor de la Morena** as they share their insights on enhancing safety measures and addressing threats to sacred spaces.

The second video is an enlightening journey through Rome's Tiber Island, a site steeped in history and symbolism. This remarkable location is home to a historic hospital favored by many women for childbirth, as well as two significant places of worship: the Church of St. Bartholomew and the Jewish Temple of the Youth, which share a common wall. In this video, **Sandro Di Castro**, the former president of the Jewish Community in Rome, delves into the unique history of the Jewish Temple of Youth (of which he is the founder). He shares previously untold details about its significance to the community. Di Castro also discusses the measures taken to ensure the security of this sacred space and offers a vision for interfaith collaboration aimed at protecting not only this temple but other places of worship as well, with a steadfast commitment to peace .





Paul Abou Naoum
Catholic Priest of the Archdiocese of Brussels

On September 5, 2024, Fedactio spoke with representatives of Sainte-Suzanne Church in Schaerbeek (Brussels) about the importance of protecting places of worship and promoting interfaith dialogue. In this interview, **Paul Abou Naoum** and **Florence Verbrugghen** share their views on the challenges faced by religious communities today. It is also about raising public awareness that places of worship belong to everyone as a common good to be protected, not just to a specific community. Beyond their possible heritage value, these places are deeply rooted in the social fabric and contribute positively to society.

In this video, we interview **Stijn Ledegen** to discuss key aspects of safeguarding places of worship. We explore what defines a place of worship and why terms like threats, risks, and attacks are used differently in security studies. Stijn provides insights on common threats faced by sacred spaces in Europe, comparing intentional attacks with structural issues like natural disasters. We also discuss prevention strategies, including the role of technology, community efforts, and public authorities in protecting these sites. Lastly, we examine how interfaith dialogue and geopolitical tensions affect the security of places of worship.



“

"It's very important that security measures for places of worship are developed in dialogue with those who lead them, ensuring they are appropriate and sensitive to the self-understanding of each place."

PROF. DR. PAUL G. WELLER

“

"I feel the same pain if a synagogue, a Catholic church, or a mosque is attacked. We must ensure that these religious extremists are somehow completely annihilated, not physically annihilated but ideologically."

SANDRO DI CASTRO

“

"The absence of dialogue is really an open door to conflicts and truly to real wars. And I am always surprised by people who criticise the work of interreligious dialogue, saying that it is useless, that it is just chatter. And I say, but how is it possible that in 2024, we can still think this way about interreligious dialogue, when over 70% of people on this Earth believe in something."

PAUL ABOU NAOUM



INTERFAITH SYMPOSIUM ON PROTECTING PLACES OF WORSHIP: A UNIFIED APPROACH TO SACRED SPACE SECURITY

BY CENAP AYDIN & ASIM KILICARSLAN

The third interfaith symposium on protecting places of worship, held in the heart of Rome, brought together religious leaders, scholars, and security experts from across the globe to discuss and collaborate on safeguarding sacred spaces. This event was part of the PROTONE / *Harmonising Diversity* project, a cross-cultural initiative designed to enhance the security of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other places of worship while promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

The symposium was organised by **Istituto Tevere**, an NGO based in Rome focusing on fostering intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and security through research and collaborative action, in partnership with **Religions for Peace Italia**, a branch of the global organisation that unites the world's religious communities to address critical challenges through interfaith cooperation and action and international partners of the Protone Project, **Intercultural Dialogue Platform, Arco Forum, House of One, Stiftung Dialog und Bildung, Fedactio** and **University of Leiden**.



The symposium, hosted at *Il Pitigliani – Centro Ebraico Italiano*, provided a dynamic platform for participants from Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and beyond. It featured a rich program of discussions, research presentations, and site visits, emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility in protecting sacred spaces across diverse faiths.

DAY ONE: RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND INTERFAITH COLLABORATION

The event began on November 20th with a study tour exploring both historical and contemporary places of worship in Rome. This was followed by the presentation of the findings of a comprehensive research report on the security of places of worship, led by Professor Tahir Abbas from the University of Leiden. His findings sparked insightful discussions among experts, with contributions from various religious and cultural leaders including Professor Fiorella Kostoris of Sapienza University and representatives from the Bahá'í, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities.

During the panel "Glocal Reflections on the Places of Worship" speakers such as Michael Driessen from John Cabot University and Johann Hafner from the University of Potsdam addressed topics ranging from transnational interfaith cooperation to the intersection between memory and present while constructing a new places of worship according to emerging urban needs, as in the case of House of One in Berlin.. These discussions highlighted the importance of a "glocal" approach to religious site security—one that balances local traditions with broader, international efforts.

Other major discussions included **the role of media and journalism in shaping perceptions of religious security and the integration of security measures in architectural design**. Speakers such as Francesca Baldini, a journalist who mainly covers interfaith events, and Tehseen Nisar Hussain from COPAIR, explored how media narratives impact public understanding and the potential for fostering interfaith peace through careful representation as well as the role of religion in the public sphere. In addition, a panel of academics from various institutions discussed the balance between preserving cultural heritage and implementing modern security measures.

DAY TWO: SECURING SACRED SPACES TOGETHER



The second day of the symposium continued with the formation of the **Interfaith Council for Peace and Security**, composed of members from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, and Bahai traditions. The Interfaith Council is a platform constituted by faith leaders, academicians and security experts aimed at enhancing the security and protection of places of worship, fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, sharing best practices, and coordinating efforts to build a sustainable network that ensures the safety, resilience, and harmony of all religious communities.

The general objectives of the Interfaith Council include:

Promote Interfaith Dialogue: Encourage open and constructive communication between different religious communities to build trust, understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation.

Enhance Security Measures: Co-develop and implement strategies to safeguard places of worship from potential threats and ensure the safety of worshippers.

Facilitate Knowledge Sharing: exchange of information, experiences, and best practices related to the protection of religious sites.

Strengthen Community Networks: Build strong, cooperative networks among faith leaders, security experts, local authorities, academics, and civil society to enhance the safety of places of worship.

Raise Awareness: Increase awareness about the importance of interfaith cooperation in protecting religious heritage and promoting peace.

SITE VISITS: ENGAGING WITH ROME'S SACRED SPACES



A central feature of the symposium was its **itinerant symposium**, which allowed participants to engage directly with Rome's sacred spaces and understand the security challenges faced by different religious communities. On November 21st, participants visited the **Buddhist Zen Center, Bahá'í Center, Hindu Temple**, and the **Torpignattara Muslim Centre**, witnessing firsthand how these faith communities incorporate security measures into their sacred sites.

The final day of the symposium, November 22nd, continued with more visits, focusing on Rome's rich and diverse religious heritage. Participants explored the **Jewish Neighborhood**, the **Great Synagogue** and **Jewish Museum of Rome**, and the **Basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola**, reflecting on the complex layers of history and security that these spaces represent. For Muslim participants, there was also an opportunity to attend **Friday prayers** at the **Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy**, reinforcing the symposium's commitment to inclusivity and understanding across religious lines.

LOOKING AHEAD



As the symposium came to a close, it was clear that the protection of places of worship requires not only physical measures but also a deep commitment to cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Through discussions with scholars, faith leaders, and security experts, attendees gained valuable perspectives on how to balance security with respect for religious and cultural practices.

The symposium's diverse approach—incorporating academic research, interfaith dialogues, and immersive site visits—underscored the need for a holistic strategy in safeguarding sacred spaces. The discussions and actions of the past few days will continue to shape efforts in protecting places of worship, ensuring they remain safe havens for worshippers of all faiths.



NEW PUBLICATION: RESEARCH REPORT



D2.4 Research Report
Protecting Places of Worship in Europe:
Between Inclusivity, Integration, and
Religious Freedom

Date: 15 September 2024



This document was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund.

This report summarises the findings from the research fieldwork conducted by Leiden University between October 5th, 2023 and April 15th, 2024 in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

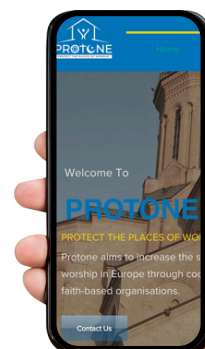
The research team conducted 43 interviews with faith leaders and representatives of the three Abrahamic communities, 12 expert interviews with security experts and researchers in the fields of terrorism and/or religion, 5 focus groups, and ethnographic research activities such as guided visits, field observations, and photo-documentation by the researcher.

The research had two main objectives. The first was understanding the intersections between religion and security in places of worship. The second objective was to understand the relationships between religious communities and the state and their implications for protective security at places of worship.

The researcher took into consideration the unique research contexts in each of the four countries and gathered data about the legal and constitutional frameworks of religious practices in each of the four countries, along with the day-to-day experiences of religious communities. Among the questions the report answers are: What are the institutional specificities of each of the three Abrahamic faiths and what impact does this have on religious communities and their use of places of worship? How do faith leaders and congregants use their places of worship, and what are their biggest challenges? What are the main safety and security risks, and what security culture is developing around places of worship in light of increased tension against religious communities in Europe? How are places of worship integrated into their surrounding communities?

Additionally, Leiden University has developed and launched a survey for worshippers in **Brussels, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid**. The primary objective of the survey is to assess the beliefs and attitudes of users of places of worship regarding their utilisation of these spaces, their connections to their religious community, and their interactions with other religious and non-religious communities. The survey also seeks to identify any security concerns that may exist within places of worship and solicit respondents' opinions on the most effective strategies for addressing and mitigating such concerns. Ultimately, the survey aims to shed light on whom users of places of worship rely on for protection and what measures they believe would guarantee their safety within places of worship.

*If you're based in **Berlin, Rome, Madrid, or Brussels**, you can take part in the survey by scanning this **QR code**.*



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