



## **AGM 2024 EBU PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The President and members of the EBU Council look after the day-to-day activities of the EBU to ensure that our various networks and projects make the best possible contribution to the life of our Union.

These are the areas where my work as President has been particularly focused in my first few months of office.

### **1) EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS**

#### **European Institutions - Brussels**

- Since last September I have regularly taken part in meetings at the European Parliament and European Commission in Brussels
- The EBU is now a regular guest at the high-level meetings organized by Art. 17, the Secretariat that deals with the relationship between EU institutions and religious denominations.
- European Buddhists have been called upon to offer their input on fundamental issues in today's society such as, for example, the relationship between ethics and artificial intelligence and the role of major religions in the European democratic process.
- In particular, in view of the forthcoming elections and the formation of the future Parliament and Commission, together with Vice-President Carlo Luyckx, I have held a series of meetings with senior members in European leadership and with European parliamentarians to create a road map for actions and themes to make the role of Buddhism in Europe even more relevant.
- Other meetings are planned between now and September to evaluate possible common actions which may be of interest to the EU institutions, and which can enter the political agenda as of now, in order to enhance our contribution on issues of interest to us as Buddhists.

#### **European Institutions - Strasbourg**

- Gabriela Frey is the EBU representative in Strasbourg. She and I organized a series of meetings to ensure continuity in our work after the April elections to the Conference of INGOs at the Council of Europe.

- Our dialogue with the Conference of INGOs' outgoing president Gerhard Ermischer (who will probably be re-elected) is always active and very positive; likewise, our relationship with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, with whose director we had an open and positive exchange.

## 2) CALLS AND PROJECTS

In February and March, we submitted two new projects to the European Commission to apply for funds from two different calls for tenders.

### "A Journey to Change"

- The first project, in the Freedom of Religion or Belief area, is entitled "A Journey to Change" and concerns the organization of an awareness-raising campaign on religious freedom on the web.
- It is aimed in particular at young people who use the web and social media in these countries: India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
- The project, of which the EBU is the lead applicant, also includes four other partners: Faith Matters, the University of Pakistan, Nawdanya International and Olaboduwe Temple of Horana in Sri Lanka.
- Total requested: **1,000,000 Euros**

### "SASCE 2" (Safer and Stronger Communities in Europe 2)

- Together with the partners from the first phase of the SASCE project, we have submitted a proposal for a new project concerning the safety of places of worship.
- Compared to the previous one, this new project intensifies the training actions and conferences in the various European countries involved.
- The other project partners are: The Security and Crisis Centre by the European Jewish Congress (SACC) (Coordinator), Faith Matters (FM) and Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
- Total requested: **285,000 Euros**

The European Commission's response on the admission of applications is expected by **June 2024**.

## 3) EUROPEAN PARTNERS NETWORK

- Enlarging and consolidating the network of partner organizations is crucial for the EBU. This allows us a greater chance of participating in funding applications and of acquiring tools, knowledge and opportunities enabling the EBU to consolidate both financially and culturally as a European institution.
- In addition to building good relationships with our partners in the two projects in part 2) above, I have established collaborative relationships with the following organizations:

#### **ALDA (<https://www.alda-europe.eu>)**

ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy, is a French-registered association dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level in the European Union, neighbouring countries and beyond.

#### **Wisedana Foundation (<https://wisedana.org>)**

Wisedana is a global philanthropic foundation working to improve the life of all living beings, offering everyone the opportunity to nurture the seed of change by engaging in systemic actions.

#### **Eulema (<https://www.eulema.org>)**

EuLeMa stands for 'European Muslim Leaders' Majlis'. The majlis (Arabic for 'council') of European Muslim leaders was set up in Amsterdam in 2018 by a group of 19 religious leaders from 18 European countries to provide a platform for better communication and coordination between Muslim communities and greater representation for Islam among other faiths and secular institutions. Eulema currently includes Islamic religious leaders from 24 European countries.

### **4) NATIONAL UNIONS TOUR**

One of my stated priorities as EBU president is to visit our national union member organisations in their respective countries to develop a closer knowledge of the various people who carry out the work of each national union and the realities of their work.

#### **Meeting with the ÖBR (Austria Buddhist Union)**

From 27 to 29 March, the first of these meetings, with the ÖBR (Austrian Buddhist Union) took place in Vienna. Two aspects were particularly important:

- The meeting with young Buddhists, where I emphasised the importance of the EBU supporting local Buddhist communities.
- The visit to the Office for Religious Affairs in the Austrian Government's Federal Chancellery, where we talked about the important role of the European Buddhist Union in the dialogue with other religions.

### **5) EBU NETWORKS AND EXPERTS**

On the instructions of the last AGM 2023, in order to make the voice of the EBU stronger and a possible Buddhist identity clearer in the European religious, social and cultural landscape, we agreed the construction of

1) a new network of experts and academics to support the EBU in its consideration of a possible European Buddhist identity.

To date there are five initial accessions of university professors from various European countries and beyond. An initial list will soon be published on the EBU website, together with the contact details of the person in charge of the network.

2) a new network of ordained Buddhists who support the EBU in addressing issues requiring specific expertise.

To date, together with Rev Dario Girolami, we have obtained two important memberships: Ajahn Amaro, a Theravāda Buddhist monk and teacher, and abbot of the Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in the UK; and Lama Allan Wallace, a very well-known Western teacher of Buddhist philosophy and meditation.

Thank you so much for your attention.

With Metta,

Stefano Davide Bettera  
European Buddhist Union President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Stefano Davide Bettera". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stefano" being the most prominent.