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## **Council of Europe: Mr Petito (Univ. of Sussex), religions can be strategic resource to nurture democratic culture**

(Berlin) “Clarity, commitment and insight”– these are the three attitudes that are expected from the representatives of religions who are meeting in Berlin today for the conference organised by the Council of Europe on “How can interreligious engagement help to re-invigorate the European democracies?”. According to Heiner Bielefeldt, former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, clarity is needed “to support democracies. Religions have not always been clear. Today, many religious leaders support autocratic leaders”, Mr Bielefeldt continued. “Commitment” – he then stressed – is key in that “it is important that communities make use of the space of religious freedom they have to speak up in defence of democracy, together with religions and non-religious associations”. And finally, there is a need for “insight: a deep crisis”, like the one that democracy is experiencing today, “requires deep responses. Marketing strategies are not enough. Indeed, there is a need to understand where the problem lies. Religious education can provide deep roots to the crucial issue of promoting democracy and respect for human dignity”. Fabio Petito (Professor of Religions and International Affairs at the University of Sussex), who was entrusted with the task of moderating the dialogue between the representatives of religions, introduced the exchange of views by noting that the request that “is on the table today marks a major change in the perspectives of governments and international institutions”. While “religion is usually considered part of the problem”, Mr Petito said, “today, religions are regarded as part of the solution as we look at how religions can be a strategic resource to nurture the democratic culture”.

Valentina Bombelli