



PARTES SPOTLIGHT



Establishing Communication Channels: Connecting Religious Communities With Local Authorities and Civil Society

The PARTES project organised a series of **national workshops across nine European countries and one overarching European Workshop**, each tailored to address the unique security needs and challenges faced by places of worship (PoW) in their respective contexts. These workshops aimed to improve dialogue and cooperation between religious communities, law enforcement agencies, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. By bringing together diverse participants, including representatives from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faith communities, the workshops provided a platform for preventive measures to protect PoW. Ever since the terrorist attacks on October 7th and the subsequent war in Gaza, its ramifications were highly palpable on the local level across different countries, especially for Jewish and Muslim communities. The research in the previous part of the PARTES project revealed that particularly in the aftermath of October 7th, security risks for many Muslim and Jewish PoW have increased, while feelings of isolation for many religious communities have intensified. Beyond the events in the Middle East, our research has shown that also Christian and other PoW have been the target of attacks and hate crime. We therefore sought to **create spaces for cross-stakeholder encounters**.

The primary objectives of these workshops were to identify existing communication channels and networking structures between PoW representatives and local authorities, and to find ways to strengthen and build on these existing structures. The workshops were designed to cover several key areas:

- **Discussion on PARTES research results:** The findings from our research in project work package 2, in which we analysed current security threats and incidents affecting PoW, were presented and discussed with participants. This allowed for a reflection on the research insights and alignment with participants' experiences.
- **Current risk & threat landscape:** Participants shared their views on the perceived threats facing their PoW, influenced by current geopolitical developments and local contexts.





PARTES SPOTLIGHT



- **Mapping of cooperation structures & security measures:** The workshops identified existing cooperation structures between PoW, law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders. Participants discussed the effectiveness of these structures, identified gaps, and proposed improvements to enhance (perceived) safety and cooperation.

European Workshop

In addition to the national workshops, a comprehensive European workshop was conducted to consolidate the findings and insights from the national events. This overarching workshop aimed to encourage a broader dialogue on the protection of PoW across Europe, facilitating the exchange of promising practices and collaborative strategies.

By bringing together representatives from the national workshops, the European workshop provided a platform to synthesise the insights and experiences from the nine participating countries. This helped in identifying common challenges and successful strategies that could be adapted and implemented across Europe:

1. **Best practices and collaborative strategies:** Participants shared effective security measures and cooperation models that had been successful in their respective contexts. These best practices were documented and discussed to create a repository of strategies that could be disseminated and adopted by other PoW and communities.
2. **Policy recommendations:** The European workshop facilitated discussions on policy recommendations to further enhance security and resilience of PoW. These recommendations will inform national and European policymakers in upcoming activities in the PARTES project and provide them with actionable insights and strategies to better support religious communities and provide better overall security for them.
3. **Strengthening networks:** The workshop also established and strengthened cross-national networks between religious leaders, security experts, and policymakers, improving solidarity-based responsibility in addressing threats faced by PoW.

Recurring topics and themes

Across both national and European workshops, several recurring themes emerged:

- **Heightened risks and geopolitical tensions:** The impact of geopolitical events, such as the war in Gaza and the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine, were a common concern. Consequently any preventive as well as reactive security measures need to factor in this influential environment and act accordingly with adapted measures or a re-evaluation of existing measures.





PARTES SPOTLIGHT



- **Need for improved communication:** There was strong consensus on the need for better communication and cooperation structures between PoW and law enforcement agencies. While in many countries loosely organised multi-agency networks with sporadic engagement exist, participants emphasised the importance of regular, structured platforms for dialogue and information sharing. In the Netherlands, the triangular system was presented which provides a cooperation framework between mayors, local law enforcement & PoW.
- **Training and capacity building:** There was a recognised need for reciprocal training, which includes training for PoW representatives to enhance their ability to recognise and respond to security risks and to create a local network map of key contacts regarding police, cybersecurity, neighbourhood actors, and municipal authorities. In Austria, the University College of Christian Churches of Teacher Education Wien/Krems (KBH) offers joint trainings for various religions and serves as an example for a functioning interfaith cooperation. Additionally, trust-building and religion-sensitive training (including an annotated religious calendar) for law enforcement was suggested to improve their engagement with religious communities.
- **Resource and funding constraints:** Financial limitations were a significant challenge for many communities, particularly in implementing and maintaining security measures. There was a call for more accessible funding mechanisms, practical support and mentoring systems to receive support when applying for funding.
- **Multisectoral awareness campaigns:** Many participants argued for the value of such campaigns to highlight the importance of safe PoW, promote the inclusion of the topic in the political agenda, and plan action groups. In Spain, the religious communities of Melilla create awareness and act against a frequent stigmatisation of religious groups by making joint public statements condemning acts of violence or hate that have occurred in their society.

This and the recurring topics above will, therefore, strongly inform our further activities in the PARTES project which will focus on the development of an innovative and holistic security approach for PoW which will be rolled out to several European countries in training activities and awareness raising events.

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