

Project's title	Interreligious Engagement and Freedom of Religion or Belief (IE&FoRB): A consultation process in the context of the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship
Summary 	<p>The project will co-produce innovative knowledge on interreligious engagement (dialogue and collaboration) as a policy tool to advance FoRB for all and combat intolerance based on religion or belief. It will be achieved through a multi-stakeholder consultation process led by the FoRB & Foreign Policy Initiative based at the University of Sussex in partnership with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Policy Planning Unit) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (Freedom of Religion or Belief Programme) under the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship. Through engagement with relevant policy initiatives, policy-makers and other stakeholders and by developing concrete strategies and policy recommendations, the project aims to impact the dominant policy approach adopted by governments and international organisations in response to the global crisis of FoRB, resulting in the adoption of interreligious engagement strategies and their support and facilitation in foreign policy at both international and domestic levels.</p>
Partners	 
Duration	March 2018-March 2019
PI & Co-Investigator	Dr Fabio Petito, Senior Lecturer in International Relations & Dr Stephanie Berry, Senior Lecturer in International Human Rights Law, University of Sussex
Rationale	<p>Religious persecution and discrimination have increased throughout the world and violations of the fundamental human right of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) are worsening in both depth and breadth (USCIRF, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017). In response to this global crisis, governments have strengthened their foreign policy tools (Petito et al 2016), emphasizing high-level declaratory statements and government to government diplomacy. However, the response is failing: there is a growing recognition of the need to engage local stakeholders and remove secular blind spots (see APPG IFoRB Report "Article 18: From Rhetoric to Reality" 2017).</p> <p>The project's basic assumption is that engagement with religious actors and interreligious collaboration are crucial policy tools to promote FoRB and combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Thus, a change in the dominant policy approach adopted by governments and international organisations in response to the global crisis of FoRB is required. Religious actors should not only be seen by policy makers as either the victims or the perpetrators of FoRB violations, but as partners in building long-term strategies to advance FoRB for all and foster pluralism, social cohesion and sustainable peace.</p> <p>Over the last few years, research and policy have begun to recognise the positive role that religious leaders can play in promoting peace, inclusive societies and sustainable development (see for example World Bank 2015). This recognition has led to the creation of new international policy initiatives and global platforms of religious engagement that promote peaceful and inclusive societies. Key initiatives include, The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), which seeks to harness</p>

	<p>the positive impact of religion in sustainable development; the UN led 'Fez Process' that identifies the role of religious leaders in the prevention of incitement to violence; and the UN 'Faiths for Rights' initiative. Unfortunately, despite the increased recognition that religious actors play a significant role in the development and stability of contemporary societies, there is evidence that religious and interreligious actors are rarely welcome at the leading global policy tables (WFDD, 2017).</p> <p>The 2018 Italian OSCE chairmanship offers a unique opportunity to influence the FoRB policy agenda given that the Italian MFA will coordinate the decision-making process of the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization and prioritize the fight against all forms of discrimination and intolerance, as well as the promotion of inclusion and inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue.</p>
<p>Outcome & Output</p>	<p>The project is conducted under the banner of FoRB&FPI in partnership with the Italian MFA and the OSCE/ODIHR, with the aim of: 1) concretely fleshing out the potential and practical implementation of interreligious dialogue and collaboration as a policy tool to advance FoRB for all and combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief; and 2) through engagement with the above-mentioned new policy initiatives and platforms, as well as policy-makers within the OSCE region, initiating a shift in the approach adopted by policy-makers to the challenges of guaranteeing FoRB for all.</p> <p>The project aims to change the dominant policy approach adopted by governments and international organisations in response to the global crisis of FoRB by increasing awareness of the importance of engagement with religious actors and interreligious engagement amongst policy makers and developing concrete strategies and policy recommendations. This will result in the adoption of interreligious engagement strategies and their support and facilitation in foreign policy at both international and domestic levels.</p> <p>The primary output of the project will be a policy report identifying recommendations and good practice for: 1) policy-makers and international organisations on how to use, support and facilitate interreligious engagement as a policy tool; and 2) religious and civil society actors on interreligious dialogue and collaboration and how to implement effective government-religious partnerships in this area.</p>
<p>Activities</p>	<p>The multi-stakeholder consultation will draw upon the experience and best practice of key stakeholders with demonstrable experience of facilitating interreligious engagement. An initial closed-door policy dialogue was held in Bologna in March 2018, in partnership with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ISPI. The meeting sought to map relevant initiatives and identify best practices and key areas of need. Subsequently, a consultation seminar will be held in London in July 2018 to consolidate the findings from the initial meeting and elaborate key areas of interest. An initial draft of the policy report will be presented at the OSCE <i>Human Dimension Implementation Meetings</i> in September 2018. It is anticipated that the policy report will be launched in December 2018 in the context of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan, concluding the Italian Chairmanship of OSCE.</p>
<p>Funding</p>	<p>Sussex Social Science Impact Fund (SSSIF) Additional funding: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Italian Institute for International Political Studies</p>
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