

# EGRD

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY  
OF RELIGIONS - IN DIALOGUE

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF DIALOGUE

In Europe and the Arab World

20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2021

Essen, Germany

EGRD



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IN DIALOGUE

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## In Europe and the Arab World

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the oil prices crash, and last but not least – the simmering tensions between the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran threatened to put the fragile equilibrium in the Middle East to the test. Given their long-standing commitment to maintaining an open and constructive exchange between Europe and the Arab world, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue and the EU-Arab Centre for Development and Dialogue are honored to cooperate with the Candid Foundation and the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in holding the international forum on the “Foundations of Dialogue in Europe and the Arab World.” The conference will bring together a distinguished group of participants from all over Europe, the UK and the Middle East, including academics, researchers, journalists, policymakers, government officials, and clerics from various religious institutions

The content will cover some of the most pressing issues, challenges, and spoilers to the mutual vision for post-conflict stabilization and economic development. During the first day, speakers with in-depth knowledge of the geopolitical dynamics will discuss the rising role of armed factions across the Middle East and their quest for legitimacy. During the dinner reception, Dr. Wahid Abdel Majeed from the renowned Egyptian Al-Ahram Centre will address participants of the conference. The workshops of the second day will focus on the international and regional power relations in the Gulf region, exploring their long-term political implications. The day will conclude with a discussion on the contested concept of a secular state, thereby looking into the multi-faceted reflections of this rather fluid concept as interpreted and lived by in Arab societies. The last day of the program will commence with a workshop on the controversial topic of “Life After Daesh,” focusing in particular on opportunities for the successful integration of women and children in post-IS societies. The second workshop seeks to debate the role of religious beliefs as well as to underline the importance of nurturing a diversity of thought as a crucial pre-condition for peaceful coexistence. During the third workshop for the day, participants will discuss the problem of radicalization in Europe and the Arab world, thereby stressing the indispensability of education for promoting critical thinking, cultural awareness, and tolerance among youth. At the end of the day, participants will commemorate the seventh anniversary of the Camp Speicher Massacre, followed by a speech by Ali Hussein Kazem, one of the survivors of the human tragedy



Alaa Al-Bahadli  
Chairman

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF DIALOGUE

## In Europe and the Arab World

To which extent do the armed factions in the Middle East pursue a model that fluctuates between constitutional legitimacy and doctrinal loyalty?

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During the first day of the conference, a distinguished group of experts will discuss the rising role of armed non-state and para-state actors across the Middle East, focusing specifically on the long-term implications for Iraq's stability. By revisiting the domestic root causes as well as the regional and transnational dynamics, which have accelerated these players' ascent to power, the experts will aim to identify efficient policy approaches meant to restore the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In view of the recent critical developments in Iraq and the increased pressure on Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi's administration to contain the malign influence of radical militias, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue and the EU-Arab Centre for Development and Dialogue recognise the importance of developing a functional road map, which can pave the path towards peaceful de-escalation and gradual resolution of the conflict.

The experts will engage in an open debate on the organisational rationale and ultimate vision adopted by these armed factions, some of which have successfully integrated part of their forces within the state-sanctioned Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU), known also as al-hashd al-sha'bi. In order to understand the attractiveness and instrumental value of the PMU for these armed factions, one has to remind of the enormous symbolic capital of the paramilitary institution, whose numerous sacrifices on the ground have undeniably contributed to the counter-terrorism campaign against the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS). Considering that the PMU has been recognised by law as an integral and yet – independent component of the Iraqi security forces, registering brigades with the PMU Commission has enabled some of these resistance-leaning factions to take advantage of the legality bestowed upon the PMU. Nevertheless, this strategic act of embedding themselves within the state apparatus has by no means prevented these armed elements from orchestrating covert operations and advocating for attacks on US troops deployed in the country. Their narrative and provocative statements have often raised the question regarding their doctrinal loyalty and their vocal allegiance to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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## In Europe and the Arab World

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By tapping into the historical knowledge and practical experiences of the carefully selected participants, the workshop seeks to identify implementable solutions to the looming legitimacy crisis and prevent Iraq from turning into another battlefield for rival geopolitical blocs. In the course of the workshop, participants will elaborate on the entrenchment of these hybrid actors within the Iraqi political landscape – often with the official endorsement of state authorities. Acknowledging the licit and illicit involvement of these actors in acts of service provision, the workshop participants will also draft concrete measures designed to tackle the governance vacuum in areas of limited statehood by improving basic security and justice delivery.

Last but not least, the workshop is envisioned as a platform for a candid dialogue on how to safeguard Iraq's national interests without inviting an ill-timed violent escalation, which could have negative spill-over effects both for the immediate neighbourhood as well as for Iraq's international partners and their presence in the region. Any recommendations discussed within the framework of the workshop will be seen as a stepping stone for further exchange with Iraqi decision-makers and government representatives, who will be invited to comment on the feasibility of the presented ideas.



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ATLANTIC CONGRESS HOTEL ESSEN



## DAY 1: 20<sup>th</sup> MAY

09:30-10:00am	<b>Arrival and Check in</b>
10:00-11:30am	<b>Workshop No 1</b> (closed discussion of 40 invited experts from Europe and Arabia)  To which extent do the armed factions in the Middle East pursue a model that fluctuates between constitutional legitimacy and doctrinal loyalty?
11:30-12:00pm	<b>Coffee Break</b>
12:00-01:30pm	<b>Workshop No 2</b> (closed discussion of 40 invited experts from Europe and Arabia)  To which extent do the armed factions in the Middle East pursue a model that fluctuates between constitutional legitimacy and doctrinal loyalty?
01:30-03:00pm	<b>Lunch at hotel</b>
03:00-04:30pm	<b>Workshop No 3</b> (closed discussion of 40 invited experts from Europe and Arabia)  To which extent do the armed factions in the Middle East pursue a model that fluctuates between constitutional legitimacy and doctrinal loyalty?
04:30-05:00pm	<b>Closing, coffee and cake</b>
07:00-09:00pm	Invitation to a Dinner in Honour of Dr. Wahid Abdel Majeed - the Egyptian Al-Ahram Centre

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**DAY 2: 21<sup>st</sup> MAY**



09:00-09:30am

**Admission & Registration**

09:30-11:00am

## **Workshop No 4**

The International and Regional Relations in the Gulf and its Political Implications

11:00-11:30am

**Coffee Break**

12:00-01:00pm

## **Workshop No 5**

The International and Regional Relations in the Gulf and its Political Implications

01:00-02:30pm

**Lunch at hotel**

02:30-03:45pm

## **Workshop No 6**

The Concept of Secular State and its Reflection in Arab Societies

03:45-04:00pm

**Coffee & Cake**

04:00-05:15pm

## **Workshop No 7**

The Concept of Secular State and its Reflection in Arab Societies

07:00-09:00pm

**Dinner at the Restaurant**

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**DAY 3: 22<sup>nd</sup> MAY**



09:00-09:30am

**Admission & Registration**

09:30-11:00am

## **Workshop No 8**

Life After Daesh: Opportunities and Challenges for the Integration of Women and Children in Society

11:00-11:15pm

**Coffee Break**

12:00-01:00pm

## **Workshop No 9**

Religion and Diversity of Thought: Conditions for Peaceful Coexistence

12:45-2:15pm

**Lunch at hotel**

02:30-03:45pm

## **Workshop No 10**

Radicalisation in Europe and the Arab World: The Role of Critical Thinking and Education in Dealing with Youth

03:45-04:00pm

**Lunch at hotel**

04:00-05:30pm

## **Workshop No 11**

Reconstruction and Youth: Prospects for the Future of Iraq. The 2019 Model of the Ministry of Youth and Sport

05:30-07:00pm

**Free Time**

07:00-08:30pm

## **Open Event:**

**Seventh Anniversary of the Camp Speicher Massacre Countering the Recurrence of the IS Extremism**

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF DIALOGUE

## The European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue

In times of obscure misinformation campaigns and post-truth politics, few actors have dared to break the filter bubbles by challenging conventional narratives. Remaining committed to building peaceful and cohesive societies, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has established itself as one of these bold champions of intercultural understanding, who have not hesitated to counter the spread of destructive conspiracy theories and negative stereotypes

Especially in politically sensitive post-conflict environments such as Iraq, war imagery along with reports of indiscriminate violence have for far too long dominated the subjective perceptions of outsiders with limited grasp of the domestic realities. Having identified this gap, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has taken upon itself to unlock new channels for exchange between local populations and those external observers and stakeholders with real interest to look beyond the curtains. Therefore, whenever possible, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has facilitated many highly informative trips for academics, researchers, journalists, and decision-makers, enabling those to experience for themselves the changing dynamics on the ground. The beneficiaries of these individually designed programs have also been given a unique chance to form their own impressions based on high-level meetings with state officials, leading clerics, representatives of the academic elite, as well as in the context of intimate encounters with local residents, opening about their daily lives

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF DIALOGUE

## The European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue

Acknowledging that complex challenges such as sect-coded violence, geopolitical rivalries and intra-societal conflicts call for a candid, evidence-based and open-ended discussion, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has spared no time and resources to bring the right mixture of people around the table. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has never shied away from assembling a wide range of actors with often competing interests or even conflicting worldviews, designing the atmosphere for a respectful and constructive debate. By thinking out of the box, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has developed a set of innovative methods meant to encourage participants to share their concerns, thoughts, and aspirations without fear of being misjudged by their peers. In order to guarantee that interconnected issues are being understood in their complexity, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has the practice of inviting distinguished experts on the topic, who then provide the necessary background knowledge and make sure that all participants are equally familiar with the root causes and long-term implications of the problems discussed

In creating such numerous opportunities for people from various religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds to come together and communicate with each other at eye level, the European Association for Inter-Faith Dialogue has largely contributed to eliminating some of the deep-rooted prejudice standing in the way of harmonious coexistence



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