

Meeting with Pope Francis

You will meet Pope Francis. You will also meet Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin - Archbishop Gallagher, the Holy See Foreign Minister, will also participate in that meeting.

Likely topics (for both meetings):

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- *Outcome and follow up to the Conference on the future of Europe*
- *EU Special Envoy for freedom of religion or belief*
- *(possibly) Lebanon.*

EU Special Envoy

Former EU Commissioner Christos Stylianides had been appointed as Special Envoy for freedom of religion or belief outside the EU in May 2021. He resigned from his position as Special Envoy in September 2021, when he became minister in the Greek government,

VP Schinas discussed this issue with Cardinal Parolin on the phone on 6 April 2021. The Holy See would welcome an early announcement of a Special Envoy.

The appointment of a new Special Envoy – as an adviser to VP Schinas – is eminent. It should happen before the Summer Break.

Lebanon

In April 2022, the Pope received Lebanese President Aoun, reiterating his closeness to the people of Lebanon. The Pope reiterated his wish to visit the country. An apostolic visit to Lebanon was scheduled initially for mid-June, but cancelled in early May due to the Pope's health problem with his knee. There is no new date for the visit.

Lebanon is crucial for the Holy See as it is the only country in the Middle East that constitutionally foresees the participation of Christians in the government and as such provides guidance to Christian communities in the Middle East which have been greatly decreasing over the last twenty years.

In 2021 Cardinal Parolin met twice with Commissioner Várhelyi, including on the situation of Christians in the neighbourhood.

Conference on the future of Europe

The Holy See wants to offer a Catholic perspective on today's key challenges and citizens' concerns, such as demographic, digital and ecological transitions, youth empowerment and the role of the EU in the world.

COMECE (European Bishops' Commission) praised the Conference on the Future of Europe as "an audacious experiment in citizens' participation across cultural, linguistic and political borders". Its President Cardinal Hollerich expressed hopes for new participatory EU

initiatives building upon the Conference, making the EU citizens active protagonists of the European project. On future EU membership he said: "Ukraine and all other European countries that have applied, need a credible accession perspective."

On the Conference on the Future of Europe

- Following the official conclusion of the Conference on 9 May, the actual bulk of the work on the future of Europe has started.
- In the Joint Declaration signed at the beginning of the Conference process, the three EU Institutions have committed to follow up on the recommendations made by the Conference.
- The Commission will publish a Communication in June, setting out what is needed to bring the Conference proposals to life and respond in the best possible way.
- Many of the proposals can be achieved through either existing initiatives or ones that are already under discussion. In some areas, the Conference proposals give a push to speed up ongoing work, like for the Fit for 55 package or the proposal on minimum wages.
- A few would imply Treaty change. The EP has called for opening the Treaties and a Convention.
- Building on the experience of the Conference, the Commission will set up citizens panels – made of randomly selected citizens from across the EU – for certain key legislative files.

On Lebanon

- Thank you for your continued personal attention to Lebanon.
- The situation in Lebanon is dire. 80% of the population live in poverty. The elections on 15 May were timely; we supported them with an election observation mission. How do you see the results?
- However, much remains to be done, and it is for Lebanon to "help us help them" – first, by speedily putting a government in place, and then by finalising a deal with the IMF - there is already a staff-level agreement - and implementing reforms. *[an IMF programme would allow us to consider providing Macro-Financial Assistance]*
- We are very much engaged in Lebanon – we allocated some EUR 300 million to the country in 2021 alone. We have now allocated EUR 25 million for food security and another EUR 20 million of additional humanitarian aid. We are working on the bilateral assistance envelope until 2024. We will continue supporting the Syrian refugees that Lebanon so generously hosts.

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