

# Policy Research Alert

FROM FLASH-IT, A DISSEMINATION PROJECT RELATING EUROPEAN POLICY PRIORITIES TO EU-FUNDED RESEARCH IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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## In Good Faith: Balancing Religion and Law in Europe

**How can EU Member States manage their relationship with people of diverse faiths more effectively? The EU-funded research project RELIGARE<sup>1</sup> offers valuable guidance. Identifying linkages between legal approaches and social realities, the research points toward workable solutions that can help policymakers balance different, if not conflicting, needs.**

In light of growing diversification and the loosening of international borders, the researchers argue<sup>2</sup> that traditional ways of regulating the relationship between majority and minority groups may no longer be sufficient. A “sustainable approach to managing diversity”, they suggest, would necessitate a more “dynamic engagement with difference” as well as greater engagement with citizens in identifying responses to policy challenges.

While closely examining the situation in ten countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom) RELIGARE sought to identify policy solutions that would be meaningful and relevant on a broader European level. One example is the language used in different parts of Europe to describe social realities and religious difference. Here the researchers note that “It is not merely a question of expunging prejudicial language from public texts and the public sphere; it is a question of educating officials, judges and politicians in the use of language that finds a middle ground, rather than creating even greater polarization within societies.”

Among RELIGARE’s other policy-relevant conclusions:

- **More coherence is necessary across EU policy areas in the areas of education, employment and home affairs in connection with religious diversity**
- **An EU coordination mechanism is necessary in order to share experiences and practice on managing issues of religious diversity and secular models**
- **EU institutions should develop a policy that addresses the multiple causes of religious discrimination and provides a basis for combating them**

Overall, the researchers urge those dealing with religious diversity issues to respect two key concepts: reasonable accommodation and inclusive even-handedness.

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<sup>1</sup> Religious Diversity and Secular Models in Europe: Innovative Approaches to Law and Policy

<sup>2</sup> RELIGARE: Messages to Inform Policymaking, May 2013, [www.religareproject.eu](http://www.religareproject.eu)