

## Introduction

I'd like to welcome you all to this rather unusual Faith in Europe event. As perhaps you know, we in Faith in Europe have functioned under various names for quite a time. In the 1960s some of us set out to study, understand and support religious faith in what was then the communist sector of Europe. Since then our agenda has included the consequences of the end of communism, the achievements of the ecumenical movement, the formation of the European Union and the furtherance of the 'European Project'. We have members from the main Christian denominations in Britain, with Jewish and Muslim links as well. We hold regular briefing meetings, bringing together the interfaces between faith and politics in geographical as well as political Europe. These have ranged from the legacies of the Reformation to prospects for the European External Action Service.

To start with, for today's business, we say that we hope for a Europe that is safe for faith.

A number of us, ranging from Quakers to Catholics, have social teachings or testimonies that quite properly end up as – love the Lord and love your neighbour as yourself. This formulation has been bequeathed to us from the Jewish faith, and preserved in Islamic teaching – it was in 2007 that 138 Muslim scholars wrote to the Christian leaders to remind them of 'a common word between us and you'. My point is that there is one thing that all the European countries have in common. We may not all belong to the eurozone or the European Union but we are all neighbours.

Now, a lot of ideas are floating around for us to deal with today, but I'd like to dwell for a moment on the concept of the divided brain. In a European context, the left brain is for calculation, for economic viability, for health and safety, for carbon capture. The right brain is for human interaction, for experience of all the arts, and above all for neighbourliness. Many of the contributions we shall be discussing today may well be left brain stuff, but we hope that our overall conclusion, with right brain prompting, will come close to the imperative of Jaques Delors – giving a soul to Europe.

In the Europe of today, after upheavals such as Brexit, Covid and populism, a whole range of new priorities is shaping for the future. Faith in Europe is looking for new members to take up leadership positions to tackle these. We hope and expect that the people gathered here today will include enthusiasts for the renewed mission of Faith in Europe who will want to join us as we move forwards into the next phase of European experience.

*Philip Walters is General Secretary of Faith in Europe*