



International
Congress Renovabis

Dialogue and Encounter Between East and West



30th International Congress Renovabis

16 - 18 September 2026

in Freising and via Livestream

Beyond Polarisation.

Perspectives for Social Cohesion in East and West

Social cohesion in Europe is under immense pressure. Polarisation, a loss of trust in institutions, digital bubbles and the consequences of the war against Ukraine have weakened social bonds. These developments have far-reaching consequences: loneliness is becoming a mass phenomenon, mental health issues are on the rise, and the emphasis on individual uniqueness reinforces tendencies that make cooperation more difficult. The lower the level of cohesion, the higher the cost of cooperation. This affects Central, Eastern and Western Europe alike, though driven by partly different factors. Europe may already have crossed a tipping point – each new crisis is increasingly difficult to manage. Churches have enormous potential to bring people together, foster trust and put solidarity into practice. However, they themselves are affected by divisions and are confronted with forces that have a polarising effect. At the congress, we would like to address how these developments can be countered, what avenues for action are available, and how our societies can grow closer together again.

Internationaler Kongress Renovabis

The International Congress Renovabis, which has been held annually since 1997, serves to inform and discuss important developments in the church and society in Central and Eastern Europe, but also addresses topics of pan-European significance. Thanks to the participation of numerous guests from all parts of Europe, the congress has developed into an important forum for dialogue between East and West.

Programme

Wednesday, 16 September 2026

Venue: Asam Building

- 15:00 **Guided Tour of Freising's Old Town**
(optional – participation only possible with prior registration)
in German, English and Italian; Cathedral Hill not included
Duration: appr. 90 minutes
Meeting point: courtyard of the Asam Building
Please note that the guided tour route partly passes through the historic city area, which is only partially accessible (for people with impairments/disabilities).
- from 15:00 **Registration and Distribution of Congress Documents** at the Reception
- 17:00 **Get-Together**
Venue: Foyer Asam Hall
incl. **Dinner** (Buffet) until around 18.30
- 19:00 **Presentation of the Freising Dialogue Award**
- afterwards **Informal gathering** in the Foyer

Thursday, 17 September 2026

Venue: Asam Building

(any differing venues for the parallel panel discussions and dialogue groups will be announced on site)

- from 08:00 **Registration and Distribution of Congress Documents** at the Reception
- 09:00 **Welcome and Opening** of the Congress
- Archbishop Dr Heiner Koch, Archdiocese Berlin, Renovabis 'Aktionsrat', Berlin (Germany)
 - Rev. Prof. Dr Thomas Schwartz, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)
- Moderation: Claudia Gawrich, Central Committee of German Catholics, Berlin (Germany)

Signs of the Times Amid Increasing Polarization

- 09:15 **Introduction to the Topic**

- 09:30 **Presentation: Challenging Times in Europe – for Social Cohesion Too?**
- Dr Regina Arant, Bremen International Graduate School of Social Science, Bremen (Germany)
- Presentation: Social Cohesion in Late-Modern Central Eastern Europe: Myth, Risk, or Necessity?**
- Hugo Gloss, DEKK Institute, Social Cohesion Research Centre, Bratislava (Slovakia)
- 10:30 Coffee Break
- 11:00 **Parallel Panel Discussions: Forces of Division, Dynamics and Possible Responses**
- Panel 1: Test the Spirits – Seeking Truth in the Digital Space Between Algorithms, Filter Bubbles, and the Search for Orientation**
- Dr Christopher Koska, Koska & Töchter, Universität Augsburg, Lehrstuhl für Moraltheologie, Gstadt-Gollenhausen (Germany)
 - Don Damir Stojić SDB, Croatian Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Zagreb (Croatia)
 - Asst. Prof. Ana Jeličić Ph.D, Centre for the Ethics of Digital Communication and Algorithmic Ethics, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Split (Croatia)
- Moderation: Ralph Allgaier, Bishops' Aid Agency Misereor, Aachen (Germany)
- Languages: German/English
- Panel 2: "Where Is Your Brother?" – Learning to See Our Neighbours Again in Times of Social Disconnection and Alienation**
- Archbishop Dr Heiner Koch, Berlin (Germany)
 - Bettina Locklair, Catholic Association for People in Rural Areas, Bad Honnef (Germany)
 - Dr Shkelzen Marku, Foundation „Partnership for Development“, Tirana (Albania)
 - Dr Sanda Smoljo-Dobrovoljski, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Zagreb (Croatia)
- Moderation: Claudia Gawrich, Central Committee of German Catholics, Berlin (Germany)
- Languages: German/English

Panel 3: Preserve Unity – the War Against Ukraine and the Divisions Within Europe

- Dr Toms Rostoks, Centre for Security and Strategic Research, Riga (Latvia)
- Tetiana Stawnychy, Caritas Ukraine, Lviv (Ukraine)
- Michal Lebduška, Association for International Affairs (AMO), Prague (Czech Republic)

Moderation: Dr Mario Galgano, Vatican Radio / Vatican News (Vatican)

Languages: German/English/Italian

13:00 **Lunch** (Buffet) in the foyer

14:30 **Roundtable: Church(es) between the mandate for unity and forces of division**

- Zbigniew Nosowski, Quarterly magazine „Więź”, Warsaw (Poland)
- Dr Ana Raffai, Organisation RAND – ‘Regional Centre for Non-Violent Action’, Zagreb (Croatia)

Moderation: Dr Mario Galgano, Vatican Radio / Vatican News (Vatican)

15:30 Coffee Break

16:00 **Dialogue Groups: Start Small – Living and Practicing Cohesion**

Workshop: Recognising Your Own Prejudices – Combating Discrimination

In this workshop, we will explore the theory of group-focused hostility in order to better understand different forms of discrimination and to be able to counteract them. Furthermore, through practical exercises, we will reflect on our own thought patterns and structures of prejudice.

- Dr Claudia Pfrang, Domberg Academy, Freising (Germany)

Language: German

Workshop: Beyond "Us versus Them": Overcoming Division through Nonviolent Communication

This workshop introduces participants to the principles and model of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg to transform judgmental thinking into empathic, compassionate connection and action. And the key point is the language that unites rather than divides, bringing awareness to what truly matters to us and others, paving the way for better cooperation, shared power and humanity. Through real-life examples you will learn how to integrate NVC into your daily life as a spiritual practice not only with God but with others as well.

- Sr. Dr Dalia Verbylė SJE, Trainer in Nonviolent Communication, Kaunas (Lithuania)

Language: English

Workshop: Conversatio in Spiritu

The workshop invites participants to discover the method of 'Conversation in the Holy Spirit'. By listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit together, we can nurture what gives us direction strengthens community and opens new paths of faith. By listening to one another 'with the ear of the heart', we become open to God's inspiration. This (synodal) exercise aims to encourage us to consciously set aside time within the group for this listening and to reflect together on the questions that move us, in a spiritual atmosphere.

- Rev. Dr Christian Hartl, Episcopal Representative for Spiritual Life in the Diocese of Augsburg, Stadtbergen (Germany)

Languages: German/Italian

Roundtable: Where Cohesion Flourishes on a Small Scale – Civic Engagement and Volunteering

Social cohesion is sustained not only by political debate and institutional frameworks, but also by solidarity and commitment. In many places, voluntary work helps to build trust, foster relationships and provide practical support. In many countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, however, this commitment cannot be taken for granted and is hampered by cultural and political factors.

- Tünde Mihály, Caritas Alba Iulia (Romania)
- Mindia Tavkhelidze, Caritas Georgia, Tbilisi (Georgia)

Moderation: Dr Markus Grimm, Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, Bonn (Germany)

Languages: English/German

Roundtable: Faith in Dialogue with Other Religious Communities – Building Bridges in Polarised Societies

Interfaith dialogue becomes particularly important where social tensions or historical burdens make encounters difficult. The focus is on the question of how spaces of trust can be created under difficult conditions, what brings people of different religious backgrounds into dialogue with one another, and what contribution such encounters make to mutual understanding and social cohesion.

- Irina Belskaia and Michail Kemerov, Religious Association of Progressive Jewish Communities in the Republic of Belarus, Minsk (Belarus)
- Rev. Dr Šimo Maršić, 'John Paul II' Youth Centre, Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Moderation: Dr. Markus Ingenlath, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)

Languages: English/German

Roundtable: So That Everyone Belongs – Inclusion as a Christian Responsibility

Social cohesion is demonstrated by whether everyone truly feels included. People with disabilities still experience first-hand how quickly barriers can limit their participation – in everyday life, in the church and in society. This round of talks explores what needs to change so that inclusion is not merely an aspiration but becomes a lived reality, and what we can learn from the experiences of people with disabilities to foster a society based on solidarity.

- Ljupka Mihailovska, Council for Inclusion in Serbia, Belgrade (Serbia)
- Stefan Paloka, Caritas Albania, Tirana (Albania)

Moderation: Martin Lenz, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)

Languages: English/German

18:00 Holy Mass at Freising Cathedral

in English

Main Celebrant: Cardinal Dr Mario Grech, Synod of Bishops (Vatican)

Sermon: Archbishop Dr Heiner Koch, Berlin (Germany)

19:15 Dinner and Informal Get-together

Venue: Foyer Asam Hall

Friday, 18 September 2026

07:45 Opportunity to attend a **Holy Mass** at the Pallotti House in Freising (with the option of concelebration for bishops and priests)
Venue: Pallottinerstr. 2, D-85354 Freising

Venue: Asam Building

from 08:00 **Registration and Distribution of Congress Documents** at the Reception

Dr Claudia Pfrang, Domberg Academy, Freising (Germany)

09:00 Morning Reflection

Impulses for Social Cohesion – Practical Approaches and Solutions

09:15 Recap of the Previous Days

- Scholarship holders and alumni supported by Renovabis

09:30 Community, Participation, and Mission – Impulses for Social Cohesion Inspired by the Spirit of Synodality

- Cardinal Dr Mario Grech, Synod of Bishops (Vatican)

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10:15 Coffee Break

10:45 **Closing Panel: Paths of Togetherness and Responsibility Towards a Culture of Cohesion**

- Cardinal Dr Mario Grech, Synod of Bishops (Vatican)
- Anahit Mkhoyan, Caritas Internationalis, Tbilisi (Georgia)
- Përparim Rama, Mayor of Prishtina (Kosovo)
- Dr Volker Ullrich, Federal Agency for Civic Education, Bonn (Germany)

12:30 **Conclusion and Closing Words**

- Rev. Prof. Dr Thomas Schwartz, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)
- Archbishop Dr Heiner Koch, Berlin (Germany)

12:45 **Lunch** (Buffet) in the foyer

Updates to the congress programme and additional information can be found at:
www.renovabis.de/congress

Parallel Panels

All conference participants are warmly invited to take part in one of the parallel panel discussions on **Thursday 17 September at 11.00**. This part of the programme comprises three panel discussions on different aspects of social polarisation, all taking place simultaneously. As the panel discussions are running in parallel, participants may only attend one discussion. Selection will take place on the spot.

Dialogue Groups

You are also invited to take part in one of the dialogue groups on **Thursday afternoon, 17 September**. This part of the programme will feature three workshops and three rounds of roundtable at the same time. In the workshops, participants can learn and practise practical communication techniques for living together in society. The roundtables focus on Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and use specific examples to explore issues of social cohesion. Each person may take part in one of the six sessions. Registration for the discussion groups takes place at the registration on the spot.

Speakers and Moderators:

Ralph Allgaier

Press Spokesperson, Bishops' Aid Agency Misereor, Aachen (Germany)

Dr Regina Arant

Research Assistant, Bremen International Graduate School of Social Science, Bremen (Germany)

Irina Belskaia

Jewish Educator, Religious Association of Progressive Jewish Communities in the Republic of Belarus, Minsk (Belarus)

Dr Mario Galgano

Editor, Vatican Radio / Vatican News (Vatican)

Claudia Gawrich

Head of the Politics and Society Department, Central Committee of German Catholics, Berlin (Germany)

Hugo Gloss

COO, DEKK Institute, Social Cohesion Research Centre, Bratislava (Slovakia)

Cardinal Dr Mario Grech

Cardinal of the Roman Curia, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops (Vatican)

Dr Markus Grimm

Officer for European and Migration Issues, Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, Bonn (Germany)

Rev. Dr Christian Hartl

Episcopal Representative for Spiritual Life in the Diocese of Augsburg, former Managing Director Renovabis, Stadtbergen (Germany)

Dr. Markus Ingenlath

Managing Director, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)

Asst. Prof. Ana Jeličić, Ph.D

Director, Centre for the Ethics of Digital Communication and Algorithmic Ethics, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Split (Croatia)

Michail Kemerov

Managing Director, Religious Association of Progressive Jewish Communities in the Republic of Belarus, Minsk (Belarus)

Archbishop Dr Heiner Koch

Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Berlin, Chairman of the Renovabis 'Aktionsrat', Berlin (Germany)

Dr Christopher Koska

Philosopher and technology ethicist specialising in Algorithmic Ethics, Responsible AI and Corporate Digital Responsibility (CDR), Koska & Töchter, Universität Augsburg, Lehrstuhl für Moraltheologie, Gstadt-Gollenhausen (Germany)

Michal Lebduška

Research Fellow, Association for International Affairs (AMO), Prague (Czech Republic)

Martin Lenz

Head of Department Projects and Country Support, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)

Bettina Locklair

National Executive Director, KLB – Catholic Association for People in Rural Areas, Bad Honnef (Germany)

Dr Shkelzen Marku

President, Foundation „Partnership for Development” (PfD), Tirana (Albania)

Rev. Dr Šimo Maršić

Director, ‘John Paul II’ Youth Centre, Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Ljupka Mihailovska

Chairwoman, Council for Inclusion in Serbia, Belgrade (Serbia)

Tünde Mihály

Regional Coordinator and Project Manager, Caritas Alba Iulia (Romania)

Anahit Mkhoyan

Consultant on the Global Induction Programme for Staff and Managers, Caritas Internationalis, former Director of Caritas Georgia, Tbilisi (Georgia)

Zbigniew Nosowski

Editor-in-chief, Quarterly magazine „Więź”, Warsaw (Poland)

Stefan Paloka

Advocacy Officer and Coordinator of Networks and Organisations for People with Disabilities, Caritas Albania, Tirana (Albania)

Dr Claudia Pfrang

Director, Domberg Academy, Freising (Germany)

Dr Ana Raffai

Leiterin, Organisation RAND– ‘Regional Centre for Non-Violent Action’, Zagreb (Croatia)

Përparim Rama

Mayor of Prishtina (Kosovo)

Dr Toms Rostoks

Director, Centre for Security and Strategic Research, Riga (Latvia)

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Rev. Prof. Dr Thomas Schwartz

Chief Managing Director, Renovabis, Freising (Germany)

Dr Sanda Smoljo-Dobrovoljski

Psychologist, Lecturer, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Zagreb (Croatia)

Tetiana Stawnychy

President, Caritas Ukraine, Lviv (Ukraine)

Don Damir Stojić SDB

Online preacher and influencer, economist with the Croatian Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Zagreb (Croatia)

Mindia Tavkhelidze

Programme Manager for Community and Volunteer Development, Caritas Georgia, Tbilisi (Georgia)

Dr Volker Ullrich

Vice-President, Federal Agency for Civic Education, Bonn (Germany)

Sr. Dr Dalia Verbylė SJE

Educationalist, Trainer in Nonviolent Communication, Kaunas (Lithuania)

and others

Organisational Information

Conference languages: German, English and Italian (simultaneous interpreting)

Registration

To register for **in-situ participation** in the 28th International Congress Renovabis in Freising, please fill in the online form on the Renovabis website:

<https://www.renovabis.de/mitmachen/internationaler-kongress-renovabis/registration>

The registration deadline is **30 August 2026**. A confirmation will be timely sent to you by e-mail. Please note: Your registration is only valid after receipt of this confirmation. Due to the space available, the number of presence participants is limited. Registrations will be considered according to the date of receipt.

Follow the Congress Free of Charge Via Livestream

Those who are unable to attend this year's Renovabis Congress in Freising will have the opportunity to follow the plenary sessions of the Congress in all three conference languages via livestream. A link will be available on the Renovabis website in advance of the event: www.renovabis.de/congress

There won't be any livestream broadcast of the parallel panel discussions and dialogue groups on Thursday.

No registration is required to watch the **livestream**.

Participation fees for on-site participants

Those attending the congress **in-situ in Freising** pay **100, - euros** for participation (including meals). Guests from Central and Eastern Europe pay **half** the fee, i.e. **50, - euros**. With the confirmation of registration, you will receive the request to transfer the fee together with the necessary details.

Please note: In case of **cancellation of your registration** after 4 September, only 50 percent of any fees will be refunded. If you cancel after 9 September, no refund will be possible.

Provision of a Subsidy Towards Travel and Accommodation Costs

Renovabis offers a standardised application procedure for applying for subsidies. You can download an application form for funding via the following link:

https://www.renovabis.de/site/assets/files/78653/2026_renovabis_congress_application_subsidy_engl.pdf

Please complete this form and send it to kongress@renovabis.de

Depending on individual circumstances, various forms of support may be available – such as an exemption from the participation fee, Renovabis covering accommodation costs, or a (partial) reimbursement of travel expenses.

The **deadline for subsidy applications is 2 August**. We will send out notifications of acceptance – and, where applicable, rejections – shortly afterwards. Registration to attend the conference is separate from this process and will remain open thereafter (i.e. until 30 August 2026). Even if your grant application is rejected, you will still be able to attend the conference.

On-site Registration

As you will need to register at the conference reception in the Asam Building (Marienplatz 7, D-85354 Freising), we would ask all participants to arrive on time.

Opening Hours of the Congress Reception

- 16 September: 15:00 – 21:00
- 17 September: 08:00 – 20:30
- 18 September: 08:30 – 13:00

Venues

All plenary sessions will take place in the Asamsaal (Asam Building, Marienplatz 7, D-85354 Freising). Any venues for the parallel panel discussions and dialogue groups on 17 September that differ from this will be announced on the day.

The meeting point for the guided tour of Freising's Old Town on 16 September (15:00) is the courtyard of the Asam Building (Marienplatz 7, D-85354 Freising).

Holy Masses will take place on 17 September (18:00) at Freising Cathedral (Domberg 36, D-85354 Freising) and on 18 September (07:45) at the Pallotti House in Freising (Pallottinerstraße 2, D-85354 Freising).

Arriving by Car

We recommend that guests arriving by car find out about parking facilities in Freising's old town or at their respective hotels.

Meals and Accommodation

Please specify in the registration form which **meals** you intend to attend and, where possible, commit to your selection in order to avoid unnecessary food waste.

If you would like to stay overnight in Freising, we ask that you arrange your own **accommodation**. The following hotels have set aside a block of rooms for conference participants, which can be booked independently using the key words provided below – please also note the relevant deadlines:

Mercure Hotel München Airport Freising

Dr.-von-Daller-Str. 1-3, D-85356 Freising

<https://all.accor.com/hotel/A0Q8/index.en.shtml>

109 euros (single room), 114 euros (double room/single use), 119 euros (per night for two people in a double room) – each including breakfast

Booking by **no later than 18 August 2026** quoting the key word „**Renovabis**“:

Tel.: +49 (0)8161 5320 | ha0q8-re@accor.com

Isar Hotel

Isarstr. 4, D-85356 Freising

https://www.isarhotel.de/en_isar-hotel-freising.htm

99 euros (single room or double room single use), 130 euros (per night for two people in a double room) – each including breakfast

Booking by **no later than 19 August 2026** quoting the key word „**Renovabis**“:

Tel.: +49 (0)8161 8650 | info@isarhotel.de

Guest House of the Deula Bayern GmbH Vocational Training Centre

Wippenhauser Str. 65, D-85354 Freising

<https://www.deula.de/standorte/deula-freising/ueber-uns/gaestehaus-verpflegung/gaestehaus>
(in German only)

54 euros (single room Category B), 67 euros (single room Category A) –
plus 7,80 euros for breakfast

Booking by **no later than 1 September 2026** quoting the key word „**Zusammenhalt**“:

Tel.: +49 (0)8161 48780 | info@deula-bayern.de

Please note:

All hotel bookings must be made independently; you are responsible for covering the cost of your accommodation (this does not apply to contributors or participants who are provided with accommodation as part of an approved subsidy).

If you have any **questions**, please contact:

Renovabis

Thomas Hartl

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