

European Buddhist Union

September 27th 2013

Values, Vision, Mission and Goals

Who we are

The European Buddhist Union (EBU) is a network of Buddhist organisations and national Buddhist unions in Europe. We are open to all schools and traditions of Buddhism in Europe wishing to unite on the basis of Buddhist teachings and work together in spiritual friendship and respect for diversity.

Our values

We believe in the limitless potential of all beings for wisdom and compassion.

We are motivated by the values of non-violence, compassion, kind-heartedness and responsibility, which are at the heart of Buddhism.

We encourage openness, clarity and transparency within the EBU, and within the societies in which we live and work.

We support the implementation of Human Rights and equality and individual responsibility for all, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, nationality, social origins, birth status or any other distinction.

We believe that oppression, discrimination, labour exploitation and all aspects of social and economic injustice should be transformed into openness, freedom, co-operation and peace.

We share the values that inspired the founders of the Council of Europe and the European Union: of creating and maintaining peace, solidarity and diversity across Europe, after centuries of war and discrimination, via free, democratic, open and non-discriminatory states.

At the root of many modern difficulties may often be found greed, anger and prejudice. Though these may be personal and local in origin, their consequences may be global and collective.

We believe that Buddhist practice, founded in a deep understanding of interconnectedness, can help transform attitudes. With wisdom and compassion, unhealthy consumerism and over-exploitation of our planet can be transformed into care for all life forms and deep respect for the earth and its ecological diversity.

Our vision

We envision a European fellowship of Buddhists bringing Buddhist ideas and principles into European society. We wish that the voice of Buddhism should help bring about a world guided by wisdom and compassion, for the happiness and wellbeing of all.

Our mission

Our mission is to facilitate international exchange and promote spiritual friendship amongst European Buddhists, to support social action and ideas motivated by Buddhist values, and to amplify the voice of Buddhism in Europe and worldwide.

Our goals

to be the leading European network giving European Buddhists a voice in Europe through information, networking and action.

to develop capacity within particular European Buddhist communities; for example, teachers, mediators, hospice-workers and prison chaplains.

to promote dialogue amongst Buddhist traditions and with other religions, beliefs and philosophies.

to promote Buddhist culture, ethics, philosophy, politics, social action and practice in Europe.

to be a forum for discussion of teaching about Buddhism in European schools and universities, and to promote academic research and translation of Buddhist texts.

to establish structural, informal and exploratory channels of communication between European Buddhists and the Council of Europe, the European Union and other European and international organisations.

to identify issues in European culture and policy-making where the voice of European Buddhism can make a positive contribution.

to inform European policy-makers about Buddhism in Europe and to inform European Buddhists about European policies.

to promote the activities of socially engaged Buddhists and share ideas about how Buddhism can contribute to a better world.

to build partnerships with other organisations to end discrimination and prejudice and promote human rights and the flourishing of all living beings.

Our background

All Buddhist schools are inspired by the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,600 years ago. Today Buddhism forms the fourth largest religion in the world.

Buddhism has characteristics found in religion, philosophy and science alike, yet cannot be reduced to any of these. Therefore, Buddhism has an unusual position within the European religious, philosophical and scientific landscape.

Like other religions, Buddhism challenges us to ask some of the deepest possible existential questions. It has temples, lay people, monks, nuns, ordination, rituals and prayer; and it offers meditation and spiritual training. On the other hand, like philosophy, Buddhist methodology is non-dogmatic and follows rigorous logical analysis. It is empirical and embedded in a non-theistic tradition, as is science.

Hence, Buddhism can shed fresh light on our traditional definitions, categories and preconceptions, which may result in a better cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary understanding.

The influence of Buddhism on European culture began around 2,000 years ago, in the time of Alexander the Great. Greek philosophers such as Pyrrho of Elis, who travelled with Alexander all the way to India, were strongly influenced by Buddhism. Buddhist monks and scriptures were known in pre-Christian Europe.

European Buddhism today

There are presently around 3 million Buddhists across Europe, east and west, including the Buddhist Republic of Kalmykia.

The roots of a settled Buddhist presence in Europe date back to the 19th century. European Buddhism is growing fast and makes an important intellectual, spiritual and cultural contribution to European society. Today, the political authorities of most European countries have come to some form of official recognition of Buddhism.

The EBU was founded in London in 1975, at the initiative of Judge Paul Arnold. The first Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held the same year in Paris. The AGM is an opportunity for members to meet and share experience in workshops, dialogue and other activities. The venue of the AGM changes from year to year and is provided by member organisations of the EBU; during the Cold War meetings were held on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The EBU is a member of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (2000).

In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The EBU is active in the Council of Europe's Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations.

The EBU has been a regular partner in dialogue between the European Union and European bodies concerned with religion and belief. In 2009 article 11 of the Treaty of Lisbon came into force, enshrining in primary law (Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) a structural dialogue between the EU and its religions, churches and philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

The EBU is a founding member of ENORB, the European Network of Religion and Belief, founded in Brussels, 2011.