

# To the European Parliament Strasbourg

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## Festive Proposal on the Occasion of the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Law on Freedom of Religion

*„So faith comes from hearing,  
and hearing through the word of Christ.”  
(Romans 10: 17)*

The Edict of the 1568 Diet from Torda (Turda):

*His majesty, our Lord, in what manner he – together with his realm – legislated in the matter of religion at the previous Diets, in the same matter now, in this Diet, reaffirms that in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well. If not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve. Therefore none of the superintendents or others shall abuse the preachers, no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the previous statutes, and it is not permitted that anyone should threaten anyone else by imprisonment or by removal from his post for his teaching. For faith is the gift of God and this comes from hearing, which hearings is by the word of God.*

With gratitude to God we commemorate the Edict on Religion adopted by the Transylvanian Diet held between 6-13 January 1568 here in Torda, which, for the first time in the world, passed a law with reference to the right to freedom of religion and conscience to an extent unknown up to that date.

We greet with respect our predecessors' historic achievement that announced: faith is God's gift that is awakened in us through reading and interpreting the Scripture. Therefore, it is consistent with God's will for the congregations to choose their preachers on the basis of their own religious perceptions and their free decision.

In the Europe of the time, loud with religious polemics, it depended on the wise insight of the Torda Diet to commit itself to religious diversity, rather than to the violent pursuit of exclusivity and religious homogeneity enforced by state authority. Derived from the ideas of the Reformation, the Edict guaranteed the strengthening of Protestantism, while at the same time it also accepted the existence of other denominations. Thanks to this, besides the existent Roman Catholic Church, the other three established denominations, the Lutheran, the Reformed and the Unitarian, could also take on institutional forms. And due to later laws on religion deriving from the ideas of the Edict of Torda, in the upcoming decades the Orthodox religious community also became a tolerated denomination, in the positive sense of the word. Transylvania turned into a land of religious freedom and denominational tolerance, providing shelter even those persecuted in other countries.

The Edict of the Transylvanian legislative body was unique in the Europe of the time, centuries ahead of similar decrees. While in other countries of the old continent local rulers or dominant denominations were seeking exclusivity, when those with dissident mentalities from that of the majority were imprisoned or executed, while many were seeking religious homogeneity on the basis of the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* even at the cost of massacres, the Edict of the Transylvanian Diet granted tolerance, freedom of worship and growth in faith. As a result the established Transylvanian denominations and tolerated religious communities could live in relative safety in a time when the

religious map of European countries – following the doctrinal diversity of the 16th century – was quickly becoming homogeneous.

The communities' religious autonomy, that both secular and ecclesiastical leaders were to observe, may be perceived as one of the antecedents of modern democracy, gained general recognition among Western civilisations in the course of historical development. Therefore, the freedom of religion granted by the Edict of Torda may rightly be considered one of the fundamental principles of Christian Europe.

We all – regardless of our denominational or national affiliations – may be proud of the Edict, which, at the same time, also reminds us of our responsibility. The Bible-inspired wisdom, insight and striving for peace of the Edict adopted four and a half centuries ago constitutes an excellent example for all of us, and urges us to ask the Lord of history to bestow upon us our predecessors' wisdom also among the challenges of the present. The spirit of tolerance and striving for peace should inspire us so that we may experience our faith, the gift of our Heavenly Father, albeit in different denominational and national contexts, yet within a Christian fraternal family, collaborating in the service of God and people.

Glory to God alone!

Bearing in mind all the above, we, the leaders of the Transylvanian Saxon and Hungarian Evangelical-Lutheran, Reformed and Unitarian churches respectfully propose for the European Parliament to adopt a festive resolution concerning the epoch-making significance of the Edict of Torda, adopted by the Transylvanian Diet of 1568, and declare the 13<sup>th</sup> of January a day to honour religious freedom. As the spirit expressed by the 450 years old legislative act constitutes a defining feature of the ideology of Christian Europe, and given that granting the right to freedom of religion and conscience functions as one of the bases of modern democracy, we respectfully propose for the European Parliament to declare the Edict of Torda a European value of outstanding importance.

Torda/Turda, the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018

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