Freedom of Religious Beliefs and Protection of Cultural Heritage: A Comparative Study between Four EU Member States and Recommendations for Training, Education and Awareness Raising

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Abstract

Terrorist attacks and religious hate crimes have escalated in recent years, putting places of worship in greater danger around the world, especially in Europe. Short- and long-term consequences of such attacks, according to the European Commission, include acute physical injuries to people and/or irreparable destruction to highly significant religious artefacts, as well as long-term psychological traumas and increased terror in society. Despite EU and worldwide efforts to defend places of worship, there remains a scarcity of information on the reasons of such assaults and how to prevent them in the future. This paper shares original desk and field research conducted with law enforcement agents, religious leaders, and members of religious communities regarding the social ecosystem analysis of protecting religious heritage in the four partner countries as part of the PROSECUW Project, which is co-funded by the EU (Cyprus, Greece, Germany, and Portugal). Despite the multiplicity of situations, research findings point to a common need for better communication and understanding among members of various religious communities, as well as further training and education for acceptance of diversity, as crucial tools for religious site protection. The paper concludes with key security and protection recommendations for places of worship, including the adoption of novel approaches and instruments to both strengthen security and protect religious heritage.

1. Introduction-Background

The PROSECUW Project and Its Scope

Places of worship are tangible expressions of cultural heritage and are in increased danger in the world and around Europe due to terrorist attacks in the last years. These places serve not only individuals but also families and people in need (European Commission, 2021). Thus, those visiting places of worship must be able to feel safe and this should be a top priority among local, national and international stakeholders (such as religious leaders, congregants and security officers) (Liyanage & Galappaththige, 2022). One of the various ways to improve protection and security in places of worship is the engagement of the community in the protection efforts which can be achieved through education and training as well as with knowledge sharing and dissemination of research outcomes.

The main objective of this paper is to present the innovative ways through which the EU co-funded PROSECUW project employs to establish cooperation between public authorities and faith-based leaders and congregations aiming at better education and understanding of security threats, at the creation of training materials and manuals for sharing best practices as well as at the promotion of awareness raising—communication activities across the EU. Such ways are informed by various methods and tools one of which is primarily discussed here, namely the quantitative research conducted in all project partner countries.

At this stage of the project's lifecycle, the present paper shares the field research results which are focusing on the social ecosystem analysis in the four partner countries—Cyprus, Greece, Germany, and Portugal (see Appendix)—while findings from the desk research for the EU are also presented.

Eventually, the PROSECUW project in the short and medium term will benefit religious leaders and law enforcement agents through the training sessions and exchange of best practices internationally and in the long term it aims to increase protection of thousands of congregants in Europe.

2. Ecosystem Mapping on Security and the Protection for Places of Worship in the EU

The EU and Protection of Places of Worship

According to the European Commission, there are two major growing dangers to places of worship (and religious heritage): Islamic fundamentalism and far right extremism[1]. Places of worship are powerful symbols and soft targets for such extremists as they wish "to send a political message, spread radical ideolo-

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[1]EU Commission: Protection of places of worship.

gies or instill fear."[2] In this line, those "places of spirituality and contemplation [are] designed to promote inclusiveness and a feeling of welcoming and openness"[2] and therefore are not often equipped with security measures—apart from many Jewish institutions that have to deal with security threats perpetually. Therefore, places of worship constitute an "easy and attractive target"[2]. The European Commission sees short- and long-term consequences of attacks against such places: The short term refer to the direct consequences of such attacks like physical injuries to human beings (even the loss of life), physical damage of the places or the damage of artefacts with a highly symbolic and cultural meaning. Long term consequences might not be apparent in the first place but are as important as the short-term ones. Lasting traumas and disruptions, economic or psychological effects on the whole community triggered by the feeling of insecurity even in religious places are outcomes that become visible only in the weeks or even months after the attack. So, the aim should be to create as much sense of security as possible while "not impinging on the very nature and purpose of the place of worship"[2].

Different institutions of international cooperation deal with the protection and security for places of worship, but most of the times, they do it in a rather broad way turning an analysis across the European Union quite problematic, as there are only a few statistics available at EU level.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has published studies regarding experiences of anti-Semitism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018a.) and anti-Muslim hatred (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017), but these studies only take a closer look to the member states and not the EU as a whole—they do not even consider every country but only selected ones. There is also a database on the FRA's website, where they collect anti-Muslim hatred in the EU, but again an EU-wide list is not available. Besides, those are the only two religions that are thoroughly examined. For other religions, such studies or even a database do not exist. So, one must assume that we do not know how many cases of hate crime or terrorist attacks occur every year against places of worship in the European Union.

Another challenge is that national data are not fully comparable as every EU-member state has its own laws on, and measures of, recording crimes. Especially the recording of hate crimes is a special challenge, as hate crime and hate-motivated harassment very often remain invisible in official statistics. This happens outside of the public consciousness, what again fosters a high underreporting (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018b: p. 9).

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) studies take a closer look on how the states can encounter the problem (OSCE/ODIHR, 2017). For the case of anti-Semitism, a closer cooperation between the government officials and Jewish communities should lead to better protection measures that meet the

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[2]Ibid.

needs of the communities' best[3]. Community engagement and dialogue are the most important means to build up the necessary trust between the different institutions and make Jewish places safer[4]. Just visiting a Jewish place after an attack "can be an important sign of solidarity, but it should not be the first time a government official reaches out to the Jewish community."[5]

3. Security in Places of Worship in the Four Consortium Countries: Field Research Findings

The PROSECUW research team conducted desk and field research by drawing on recent literature reviews, policy papers, scientific articles, national and European regulations and laws, as well as through questionnaires with relevant stakeholders (i.e., religious leaders, law enforcement agents, community leaders). For the purposes of this paper, we report the findings of the online questionnaires r (see Annex 1 for the online questionnaire—questions 9 - 13).

In Cyprus, 51 people responded to the online questionnaire. These respondents agree that various measures are needed so that the faithful feel safe in their places of worship. The first one (72%) is the improvement of the communication and information exchange between the relevant authorities and stakeholders, and they think that there should be more awareness/training/education for the understanding and acceptance of different cultures and worldviews (66.7%) (something that the PROSECUW project aims to do). Some also recommend the installation of extra technical equipment for protection (51%) while the least important measure seems to be the existence of control systems at the entrances and exits of the places of worship (37.3%).

Furthermore, most of respondents (62.7%) believe that minority religions (e.g., Muslims, Jews) are the most vulnerable and are subjected to prejudice and bias, thus there should be extra protection measures for them. Regarding the biggest challenges towards the protection of places of worship, the answers were varied. The most common challenge that the respondents are facing in places of worship is not having many effective measures of protection at their disposal. Many think that lack of information and education on diversity of religion and culture is a key challenge along with the lack of awareness raising campaigns that could enhance safety in places of worship. Lastly, some participants consider the extreme views of fundamentalists as a challenge. A small number of participants also refer to protection challenges such as robberies, vandalism, and the abandonment of historical and cultural places of worship.

The biggest security dilemmas that the participants report are quite similar to the challenges although there are also responders who claim that they don't face any dilemmas. Among the dilemmas, there is concern for the protection of privacy and personal data during the enforcement of security measures in places of

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[3]Ibid., p. 28.
[4]Ibid., p. 18.
[5]Ibid., p. 32.

worship and the extent to which police should guard places of worship or not (e.g. there is the fear of turning places of worship into secure "cages"), how technology can be used to enhance security in those places and finally there is concern regarding the budget that is required for such security systems. Many respondents are wondering about the right processes through which the public and the authorities shall be informed and educated on these important issues. Moreover, the participants seem to worry about the lack of interaction among authorities or between authorities and the public. Thus, the proper methods of communication and the need for information exchange on the issue are common themes.

When asked regarding the means that the PROSECUW project could employ to make the places of worship safer the vast majority considers better communication and training of those involved as the most adequate solutions (which shows how important PROSECUW with its outputs is at this point) but it is also interesting to see that almost one out of three and two out of three respondents also consider security guards and technical support respectively as quite important tools for the safety in places of worship (Figure 1). That shows that training, education, and communication are deemed necessary but until we can fully rely on them, "hard" security measures are not excluded from the respondents' minds.

In Greece the same questionnaire was distributed online, and 50 persons responded. Regarding the means considered necessary for increased safety in places of worship, 68% of respondents underlined the reinforcement of a mutual understanding of the different religious views, while 34% underlined the need of more communication and an exchange of views with the people involved. 24% asked for more control at the entrances of the temples, 14% said that there is a need for more technical support and 12% for more measures at the actual buildings. One participant stretched the need to clarify the term "safety" not only regarding the questionnaire, but s/he suggested analyzing the term based on our
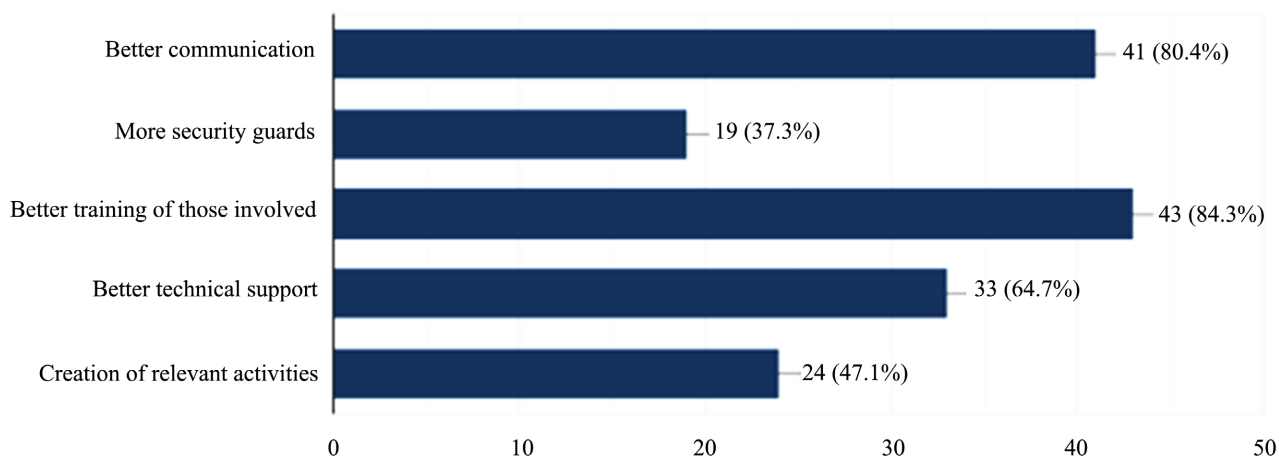
Figure 1. Suggested measures to reach the PROSECUW project aim to find ways to make places of worship safer (Source: PROSECUW, Work Package 2, Online Survey, Section 3).

findings throughout the whole PROSECUW project. If safety is defined in response to racist attacks and vandalizations then the key preventive measure would be to inform society to be more open to religious diversity. If we understand "safety" in regard to protection measures for the functionality of religious temples (fire safety, proper measures for the pandemic, etc.) then it is up to the persons in charge of the site to have timely and correct information for all that is provided by the respective legislation.

The respondents were requested to answer whether they locate differences on the protection measures needed in distinct religious traditions and to describe those differences regarding measures of protection. The fact that almost half (46%) answered that there are differences on needed measures shows that Greek citizens realize that minority religions need extra attention. More specifically, six out of 21 responses emphasized that usually minorities are dealing with dangerous situations, hence the necessity of further protective measures. There were also those who mentioned that Jews and Muslims at their places of worship are dealing with discrimination and acts of violence more often than Christians and that mosques and Jewish temples are more susceptible to hate crimes and security threats than Christian Churches not only in Greece but generally in Europe. Someone connected nationalism with religiosity by declaring that "in Greece, not being a Christian not only defines but stigmatizes you and that this is a cause of rejection and prejudice". Other respondents claimed that religious extremists, no matter the religion, are responsible for acts of violence in places of worship. One claimed that most of the time Muslims act against Christians. The general idea is that the means of protection shall differ between religions. For example, a Muslim can face difficulties in a country where the population is predominantly Christian and vice versa. It depends on the acceptance, tolerance, and inclusiveness level of every society.

Out of those whose work relates to places of worship, more than one third noted that the biggest challenge they face is prejudice and fanaticism that prevails nowadays at societies and mostly at religious communities. As they stated, religious diversity is not always accepted. Some others believe that the lack of awareness on security issues and measures, not only for the worshipers but for plain visitors as well, creates insecurity in a place of worship. For someone, this insecurity of the believers is based mostly on the fact that Christians (the vast majority in Greece) see foreigners of different faiths as dangerous and potential attackers and on the other hand, those belonging to minority groups feel marginalized. Other respondents strongly believe and suggest that leaders (religious, political) should communicate acceptance in diversity regardless of whether one believes and/or what one believes. The fact that some people have so much fear and hate in their hearts for people who are different than them, has to do with lack of education, fear mongering and propaganda of the media. On top of that, someone blamed the various theological circles that give a wrong image and misinform the congregate on what Christian theology believes and conveys. Misin-

formation can create severe problems. One of the most valuable responses shed light on the need to bridge the gap between religion and youth. It came as a suggestion that young people should understand that places of worship need to be respected and that they should act as peacemakers themselves and stand up to acts of violence against places of worship of other religious traditions.

Consequently, on the question referring to the great dilemmas that people are facing about the protection for places of worship, it turns out that there are plenty of them. One major concern is the balance between the access to worship places for the public, including people with different beliefs, and their protection. On the one hand, places of worship should be open and accessible to all. On the other hand, a series of attacks show that this is increasingly challenging as some visitors could enter with malicious goals. The balance between an "open door" policy and security is delicate and requires study and proper planning. People are worrying about the safety of worship places and at the same time about the safeguarding of human rights. Respondents believe that it is difficult for fundamentalists to understand religious freedom and the right to worship your own religious traditions. A worry was expressed about the ministry and the role of the Orthodox Church in modern societies and another one expressed the concern that in theological education the class material does not underline enough the importance of tolerance towards people of different religious beliefs and that someone should deviate from the formal curriculum of the religious course for dealing appropriately with the issue. What is worth noting is that most of the respondents wondered which are the measures that will secure safety and freedom, and whether a specific policy exists, can be implemented, and can be followed by the believers of different religions in order to be protected and safe in a temple. One of them, worried about using policing at worship places in order to remain safe and asked herself/himself whether it is appropriate to respond, "with police violence and interrogation". Eventually, all respondents underlined the importance on finding the appropriate security measures that would in turn maintain the sacred character of a religious site. In general, the majority didn't face a specific dilemma because they don't feel that their physical integrity is in danger but almost all agreed that there is a lack of information on the issue of the protection for places of worship.

In the questionnaire, it is underlined that PROSECUW aims to find ways to create more safe worship places. In the question about the most efficient measures, 78% of the participants answered that better information and awareness is a requirement, 70% believed that better communication would be the solution to this issue and 32% agreed that technical support and building infrastructure could prevent attacks. A lower percentage, 10%, answered that an increase on guarding could be helpful and there were those that proposed solutions based on educational methods to prevent hatred and encourage religious tolerance towards all religious traditions.

The responses from Portugal and Germany are more limited since the number of respondents was smaller but the views of those responding are equally useful

albeit in a qualitative sense. When participants of the research in Portugal (23 overall) were asked about what should be done in order to achieve higher protection for places of worship, the answers varied greatly, and the approaches suggested also show the different points of view (see Figure 2).

When respondents were asked if different religions need different security protection measures the majority (90%) don't see the need for differences. However, those who do see this need suggest that Judaism is being under pressure and that hate crimes target Judaism more than others. According to a Special Euro barometer survey conducted in 2019 regarding perceptions of anti-Semitism "41 percent of respondents believed anti-Semitism were a problem in Portugal, and 18 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years". The interviewees quote as problems threats against Jews in public places, vandalism and desecration of Jewish cemeteries and in short anti-Semitism acts that occurred occasionally (United States Department of State, 2019).

One of the biggest challenges faced by those working in places of worship is respect among people from different religions as well as practical concerns such as how to communicate security matters, especially under pressing/threatening situations. Some even suggested the increase of security officers paid by the government.

In Germany, a small number of people responded to the survey (eight) and most of them are Alevis (of Islamic tradition). Although the sample is far from representative it is worth examining the responses of religious minority representatives. When asked about the means they need to feel safer they stated clearly that they wish for more technical support and more communication. Most of them discussed the differences between religious minority and majority groups and suggested that minority religions, especially if there is a migrant background, need more protective measures than majority ones. However, to an extent, all religions need protection.

One of the biggest challenges they see when it comes to introducing further security measures is the right balance between the need for more security and the wish to have an open community. The dilemma is that they need the measures so that they feel safe and protected but that the measures can limit the
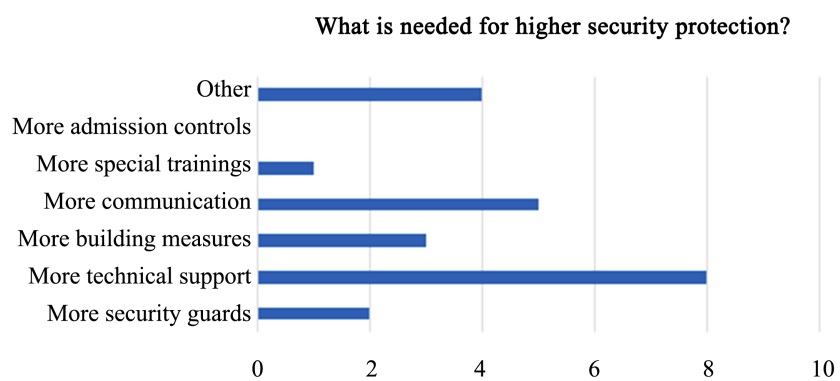
Figure 2. Needs for higher protection at the places of worship.

openness towards the community (if, for example, let in only people they know). The need for support from public authorities was raised as a means of increasing reporting of attacks and hate crimes. The respondents do not see public support as adequate for their security problems. So, the PROSECUW project could be a chance to transform the public's perceptions.

Better communication, better training of those involved, more technical support, are all seen as ways to increase safety in religious places. Interaction and communication between religious communities and local, national and international authorities is within the scope of the PROSECUW project.

4. Analysis of Findings: Different States, Different Challenges

4.1. Summary

Religious situations are different in each of the partner countries, and it is interesting to see both the similarities and the differences regarding protection of places of worship in these countries.

In three out of the four examined countries, there is a predominant religion—in Cyprus and Greece this is Orthodox Christianity while in Portugal it is Catholic Christianity. In Germany, there is no dominant religion, but many different religions are present and have only limited influence in politics and society. Each country is furthermore embossed by its cultural traditions and history that still influences the current situation.

4.2. Analysis

In Greece, the Orthodox Church has always been very dominant and the current influx of many refugees coming from primarily Muslim countries can be perceived as a threat to the majority. In Germany, due to the long history of anti-Semitism, Jewish places of worship get ample protection financed by the state. In Cyprus, the division between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots is deemed fundamental not only in terms of culture and ethnicity but also in terms of religion and dominates politics. As a result of the occupation of part of the island by Turkish forces, religious places are not freely accessible everywhere. In Portugal, the society still struggles with the acceptance of new cultural traditions and rituals from immigrants, such as the Muslim ones. Despite often attacks and threats against places of worship, questions of security for such places are not issues of major public debate in none of these countries.

Despite the different backgrounds, needs and contexts, there is one common thread revealed through the research that connects both majority and minority, local and migrant congregants: Increased communication and understanding among members of different religious communities and further training and education for acceptance of diversity are seen as key means for the protection of these important aspects of religious heritage. It is essential that the PROSECUW project follows innovative ways to promote exactly these measures as outlined below.

5. Recommendations to Increase Security at Places of Religious Heritage

Based on our findings and the PROSECUW project activities, we recommend the following tools for increasing security at places of religious heritage. It should be noted that these recommendations are based on the activities currently being undertaken by the PROSECUW consortium, as a result of the findings from the research, and are shared here for the purposes of advancing best practices in the field.

First, it is necessary to establish Hubs for Empowerment and Collaboration between various stakeholders to establish a shared space for exchange and transfer of "Communities of Practices". In doing so, the Hubs will enrich, diversify, and institutionalize cooperation among law enforcement authorities and faith-based leaders while simultaneously promoting and developing skills such as critical thinking, media, and information literacy among trainees. The Hubs will provide the opportunity to the stakeholders and the various actors in the field of the project to connect, interact and share practices, beyond the actual training implementation process.

Secondly, we recommend the development of Training Program that will arm relevant stakeholders with the appropriate skills to properly respond to and prevent hate crimes and protect the congregants as much as possible. The training sessions will also promote the communication channels between the trainees and include, apart from the public authorities, faith-based leaders from different religions cultivating also respect among them by making them understand that they face the same fears, terrorism, and disrespectful behaviors no matter what their faith is.

Third, apply the method of digital storytelling through the development of a Documentary for the engagement of, and communication to, professionals, civil societies, faith-based leaders, religious communities, and the general population. More specifically, people of various religious traditions are filmed narrating their own stories regarding experiences of hate crimes, violent attacks and disrespect they might have faced. This way, their experiences become known among the members of the public authorities and also the religious communities. They also become known to a larger, international audience and can eventually empower others who suffered similar experiences to speak about them. It can eventually strengthen the authorities by increasing reporting rates regarding enhancing and diversifying protective measures in places of worship. Based on the partners' experience in ethnographic research, all ethical and legal procedures to respect each person's personality, personal data and worldviews are established[6]. The teaser is already available in the PROSECUW YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwAQqTwvjVE).

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[6]The two Cypriot partners, CSI and RESET, have been involved in similar initiatives over the years related to the bi-communal conflicts in Cyprus, while partners from Portugal, Germany and Greece participated in such initiatives related to racism, threats, and inter-religious affairs.

Finally, awareness raising activities are key including social media campaigns, and local seminars combined with Q&A sessions to inform everyday people and local communities about the protection plans considered by authorities. All the activities mentioned before will be recorded in a manual of good practices that will be exchanged all over the EU and perfectly serves the general objective of PROSECUW which is to protect and secure places of worship.

6. Conclusion

It has been apparent that mentions of places of worship only occur in connection with terrorism, extremism, or security-related issues. But, such venues are first and foremost sites of dialogue bringing communities and generations together. They serve as forums for the exchange of data and opinions. When local and regional authorities consult with religious leaders about matters of safety and security and pay attention to what they have to say, it promotes a fruitful relationship. PROSECUW is geared in this direction and aims to address places of worship lack of concrete information and security-related material on how to protect worshippers against evolving threats.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix

The PROSECUW Consortium

The PROSECUW project consortium consists of five expert organizations operating in four countries, with a diverse background related to the subject of the project:

The Center for Social Innovation (CSI)–Cyprus, PROSECUW Project Coordinator, is a Research and Development organization, which focuses on fostering social innovation that can bring about a positive change to local, national, regional, and global entities (https://csicy.com/).

The Akademie Klausenhof (AK)—Germany, is a youth and adult education institution, particularly distinguished by the fact that it offers many different courses in one place, where learners can also stay for longer periods of time (https://www.akademie-klausenhof.de/).

Universidade Lusofona de Humanidades e Technologias (ULHT)—Portugal is the largest private university in Portugal including 10 Higher Education Institutions in Portugal, Brazil, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (https://www.ulusofona.pt/).

Centre of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES)—Greece, is a non-for-profit research center that aims to provide scientific research services, studies, conferences and publications promoting Inter-Faith Dialogues among others (http://cemes-en.weebly.com/).

Research and Education in Social Empowerment and Transformation (RESET)—Cyprus, develops constructive and education-centered solutions to demanding societal challenges, investing on the creation, evolution, and revolution of social-driven concepts, systems and practices which prioritize humanity (https://resetcy.com/).

Each partner institution contributes to the project according to its expertise and performs specific tasks. However, all of them are involved in the research outlined in the next sections.