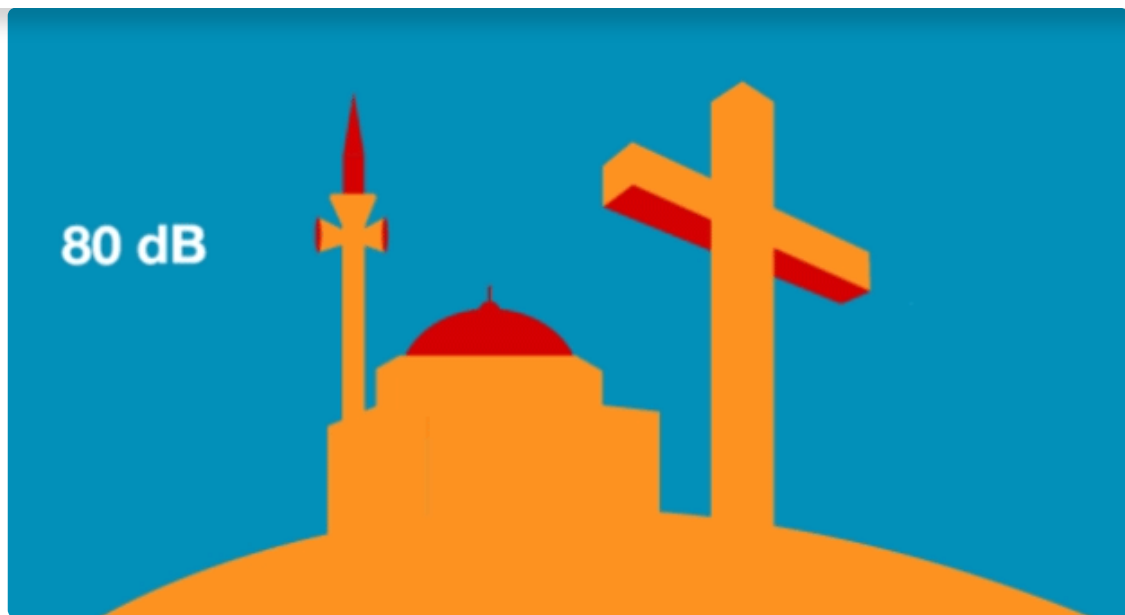




GIF: Karolina Uskakovych, European Focus.

North Macedonia is blessed with beautiful Orthodox Churches and Mosques. But sometimes, religion in this secular country can become too intrusive on the public space.

A 66-metre-high Orthodox cross overlooks the capital Skopje. Built in 2002 to mark two millennia of Christianity, this cross instils a sense of pride in some, but for others it is a prime example of megalomania, including for many Muslims who live in Skopje.

The second largest religion, Islam, has also drawn criticism. People have complained about the noise coming from the mosques' loudspeakers. I measured a staggering 80 decibels during the afternoon prayer in Skopje's Cair municipality. The legal limit is only 45 decibels of noise.

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UK holidays boost for all Faiths



Angelo Boccato

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Got it!



A sign for a multi-faith prayer room at London Heathrow Airport. Photo: Jyri Engestom.

"I have a message for Liz Truss... We work hard. We work the longest hours in Europe," the Trade Union Congress (TUC)'s General Secretary Frances O'Grady told her conference in October, referring to the former UK prime minister's [leaked audio comment](#) that British workers needed more 'graft'.

British workers have fewer public holidays (known as bank holidays, as these were initially exclusive to bank workers) compared to their European peers.

O'Grady and other union leaders have called for new bank holidays to reward British workers and this, paired up with data from the 2021 census of the Office for National Statistics, which highlights the UK's diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion, creates an opportunity.

Given the UK's rich melting pot, workers of all confessions should have the same opportunity to celebrate their religious holidays with their families, from Ramadan to Diwali, from Hanukkah to Vaisakhi, as Christians celebrate theirs.

As all British workers, religious and nonreligious, need more holidays, these times could be used to learn more about different communities in Britain, as happens during Black History Month.

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At a time when divisions run deep and social tensions are rising, the opportunity for holidays where all Britons rest and spend time with their families, while exchanging and learning about other communities, would pay tribute to the kaleidoscope of cultures, religions, and traditions that represent the United Kingdom today.

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Thank you for reading our 13th issue of **European Focus**,

and for wandering with us through the sensitive territories of a holiday torn between political struggles. To those of you who do celebrate, we wish a joyful and warming Christmas. To those who don't, we hope that you can enjoy a happy and reinvigorating vacation. And to all, we wish a peaceful, happy and healthy New Year.

See you again on 11 January!

Teresa Roelcke

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