

Luxembourg considers new church tax in debate over future of state support

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Luxembourg is considering a church tax as part of a range of possible measures to replace direct state funding for religious organisations.

The Vice-Prime Minister of the majority Catholic country, Etienne Schneider, said the Government is pushing ahead with the separation of church and state. But that the Government wants the church to be able to be financially independent while still being able to pay the wages of priests and other staff. Non-profit organisations run by the church will continue to benefit from state support to deliver welfare services.

Following his deputy's comments, Prime Minister Xavier Bettel told the [Luxemburger Wort](#) that talks with the Catholic diocese and other faith groups were ongoing and that nothing had been decided.

Mr Bettel expressed his belief that, "Religion is something personal and should not be financed by the state" and confirmed that he would seek approval for constitutional changes on the relationship between church and state.

According to the [Luxemburger Wort](#), the main opposition party the Catholic-oriented CSV (Christian Social People's Party) criticised the Vice-PM saying that his comments could leave church workers worried about their livelihoods.

Luxembourg is in theory a secular state, based on the French principle of *laïcité*. However, over the last 200 years the country's separation of church and state has been gradually transformed. The Grand Duchy's royal family are Catholic and Luxembourg retained the principles of the Concordat of 1801, granting privileged status to the Roman Catholic Church, when it separated from France in 1815.

Since then Luxembourg has officially recognised a number of other religions, starting with the Protestant Church of Luxembourg in 1894. In return for influence over religious administration and the appointment of clergy, the State pays certain running costs and wages.

Alongside a tax imposed on registered members of the church (which some commentators predict may lead to an exodus), other proposed ideas include a membership fee charged to active members, or that members celebrating special events at the church – such as their first holy communion or wedding – will have to financially contribute.

A 1979 law forbids the Government from collecting statistics on religious beliefs or practices. But, in 2011 the Centre for the Study of Population, Poverty and Socio-Economic Policy [reported](#) that the country's population was: 68.7% Catholic, 1.8% Protestant, 1.9% other Christian religion, 2.6% other non-Christian religion and 24.9% non-religious.

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