European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the draft EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief

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Pursuant to Rule 121(1) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, Laima Liucija ANDRIKIEN (EPP, LT) has proposed, on behalf of the EPP group, a proposal for a recommendation to the Council on the draft EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The draft text recalls that the Parliament has repeatedly called for **an ambitious toolkit to advance the right to freedom of religion or belief as part of EU external policy** and that freedom of religion or belief constitutes an **essential and basic right** which must be respected.

Guidelines should be based based on the following principles:

- **Scope and subject matter**: the purpose and scope of the EU Guidelines are: (i) to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief; (ii) to mainstream freedom of religion or belief in EU human rights policies and actions; (iii) to develop clear benchmarks, criteria and standards in order to enhance the promotion of freedom of religion or belief in the work of civil servants and EU officials.
- **Operational guidelines**: the basic principles underlying EU actions on freedom of religion or belief, as well as the priority areas for those actions, are identified in Part 2 of the draft EU Guidelines. The Guidelines are supported by international law and by treaties recognised by the international community and ratified by Member States.
- **Collective dimension of freedom of religion or belief**: an indispensable part of the freedom of religion or belief is the right to manifest that freedom in community with others. It includes the freedom to establish and maintain places of worship, to establish and maintain appropriate institutions with legal personality, and to appoint leaders of those institutions without external interference on the part of the state.
- **Support for – and engagement with – civil society**: support for and engagement with civil society in implementing the Guidelines is of crucial importance for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.
- **Use of external EU financial instruments**: the external EU financial instruments should be used both as incentives and as deterrents (freezing of funds) with regard to freedom of religion or belief in a particular country, being closely related to the assessment of the human rights situation as a whole in the country.