# EU guidelines and the mandate of the EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Andrzej GRZYB (EPP, PL) on EU Guidelines and the mandate of the EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.

Members stressed that freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), is a universal human right, a value of the EU and an important and undeniable pillar of dignity, greatly impacting on all individuals, their personal identity and development and on societies. This must be duly protected, promoted and safeguarded by all actors as well as enhanced through interreligious and intercultural dialogue in line with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the values of the European Union as laid down in the TEU and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Members expressed deep concern that recent years have seen a dramatic rise in violations of FoRB worldwide and persecution of believers and non-believers. They condemned the instrumentalisation of religious issues for political ends, and violence, harassment or social pressures against any individual or group of people on grounds of thought, conscience, religion or belief. They also condemned attacks against ethnic, and religious groups, non-believers, atheists and any other minorities, and persecution of women and girls, and of individuals based on their sexual orientation.

**Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU**: while taking note of the importance of the creation of the post of Special Envoy for the promotion of FoRB outside the EU in 2016 by the President of the Commission, Members encouraged the Special Envoy to continue his engagement and cooperation and complementarity of actions with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights on this issue, including the promotion of the EU Guidelines.

Members welcomed the fact that the Special Envoy has developed effective working networks within the Commission as well as with the Council, the European Parliament, and other stakeholders. They called on the Special Envoy to report annually on the countries visited and his thematic priorities.

The Council and the Commission are called on to:

- carry out a transparent and comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and added value of the position of the Special Envoy in the process of the renewal of his or her mandate;
- adequately support the Special Envoy’s institutional mandate, capacity and duties, by exploring the possibility of a multi-year term subjected to annual review and by developing working networks within all relevant EU institutions.

Members recommended that the role of the Special Envoy could include competences such as:

- enhancing the visibility, effectiveness, coherence and accountability of the EU’s FoRB policy outside the EU;
- providing the European Parliament, the Council, the Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security and the Commission with an annual progress report and a comprehensive report on the Special Envoy’s mandate at the end thereof;

- working in close cooperation with the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM);

The report noted that a number of Member States have recently created new posts of responsibility for FoRB, whose role is akin to the Special Envoy's. It underscored the need for a consistent approach that encompasses the rights of all religious communities as well as non-believers. It recommended considering the possibility of setting up an **informal advisory working group** consisting of representatives of Member States' FoRB and other relevant institutions as well as European Parliament representatives and experts, scholars and representatives of civil society, including churches and other faith-based organisations as well as non-confessional organisations.

**EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief**: Members considered that the EU Guidelines present a clear set of political lines, principles, norms and themes for priority actions, as well as a toolkit for monitoring, assessing, reporting and démarches by EU representatives in third countries, that constitute a solid strategic approach for the EU and its Member States enabling them to exert an effective role in promoting freedom of thought, conscience and religion outside the EU.

They called as a matter of urgency for the effective implementation of the EU Guidelines on FoRB in order to make the EU more influential in advancing FoRB worldwide and for a FoRB-dedicated chapter to be included in the EU Annual Reports on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, as well as progress reports in respect of the implementation of the EU Guidelines, to be communicated to Parliament and the Council.

**EU financial instruments**: while expressing their satisfaction that FoRB is identified as a priority of the European Instrument of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), Members noted the increase of EIDHR funding allocated to FoRB-related projects since the adoption of the EU Guidelines. They called on the Commission and the EEAS to ensure that EU diplomatic work for the promotion of human rights, including FoRB and EIDHR-funded projects, is mutually reinforcing, and to respect the principles of pluralism, neutrality and fairness in allocating funds.

**Sufficient funding** for FoRB-related projects should be made under the EU external financial instruments, within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027. However, Members called for an effort to ensure transparency in the allocation of funding and to monitor the use thereof by religions and their activities.