

Brussels,

## **Mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union**

Freedom of religion or belief (FORB) is a fundamental right which is one of the founding values of the European Union and to which everyone is entitled, everywhere. FORB is enshrined in international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 18) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The EU is committed to promote and protect human rights at home and abroad. Human rights including FORB are under attack or challenged in many parts of the world. In this context, the implementation of the "EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief"<sup>1</sup> adopted by the Council in 2013 remains a key priority of EU's external human rights policy.

In promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief, the EU is guided by the universality, indivisibility, inter-relatedness and interdependence of all human rights, whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural. In particular, promoting FORB is closely connected with freedom of expression.

The persistent persecution of individuals and minorities on religious, belief and ethnic grounds makes protecting and promoting this freedom inside and outside the EU all the more essential. The European External Action Service (EEAS), including through its network of EU Delegations, engages on a daily basis with partner countries to promote and protect FORB. To reinforce this action, the European Commission has decided to appoint Frans van Daele as Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.

The Special Envoy will be attached to Vice-President Schinas, who is in charge of leading the Commission's dialogue with churches and religious associations or communities, and with philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

The Special Envoy will be tasked with the following duties:

- Establish a dialogue with national authorities and other stakeholders (including faith-based organisations) of countries where FORB violations occur.
- Provide as appropriate support for intercultural and interreligious dialogue processes, including encouraging dialogue between representatives of different faiths and the setting up of joint initiatives.
- Provide support, where relevant, to measures to target de-radicalisation and prevention of extremism on grounds of religion or belief in third countries.
- In cooperation with authorities from third countries, promote religious diversity and tolerance within educational programmes and curricula.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf)

The Special Envoy will coordinate his activities closely with the EU Special Representative on Human Rights and ensure that the approach to FoRB is closely linked with the wider EU human rights agenda.

The Special Envoy will ensure a close coordination of his activities with EEAS, EU Delegations, in particular ahead of missions to partner countries, as well as with Commission services. The Special Envoy will engage with the Council and Parliament on FORB issues.

The Special Envoy will engage with the United Nations, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, the "International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief", as well as his counterparts in EU Member States and third countries. He will also engage, where appropriate, with regional organisations.

The Special Envoy will also engage, as appropriate, in the dialogue with churches, religious associations or communities, non-confessional and philosophical organisations and other relevant stakeholders conducted under Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty.

In line with the EU Guidelines on FoRB, the Special Envoy will support the efforts of civil society, including churches, faith-based and religious organisations, as well as non-confessional organisations (representing people holding non-theistic and atheistic beliefs). This support may include promoting the visibility of local organisations, including participating in public or closed events or meetings, consulting various stakeholders, and providing information and raising awareness about the EU's support in this field.