



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
People and Peace
Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance

Brussels,
devco.b.1(2020)3229623

Dear Messrs, dear members of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable,

Many thanks for your letter recalling the fruitful partnership you have been conducting with the former Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU. We agree with you that, together with other fundamental rights, the freedom of religion or belief is challenged worldwide. This is also linked to a rise of authoritarianism and a narrative of national identity, meant to galvanise political support, while excluding communities who slightly deviate from this construct.

You mentioned in your letter the pivotal role that the EU has been playing in countering this pattern, especially in relation to freedom of religion or beliefs. With the adoption of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief on 24 June 2013, the EU has committed to advance this fundamental freedom in its external action, including through its financial instruments.

Violations of this freedom enshrined in EU and international law continue to be monitored and raised regularly by EU Delegations across the world as well as by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr Eamon Gilmore. Ongoing action by the EU on freedom of religion or belief also includes the funding of projects dedicated to this objective, as your last question suggests.

FoRB has been identified as a priority of the European Instrument of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR): Article 2.1 b) (v) of the EIDHR Regulation 2014-20 explicitly mentions that the EU's assistance shall focus on "freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, including by means of measures to eliminate all forms of hatred, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and by fostering tolerance and respect for religious and cultural diversity within and among societies". The European Instrument of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has supported activities promoting freedom of religion or belief in all regions of the world via projects amounting to more than 22 million EUR in the period

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2007-18. In 2019, the same instrument was funding 10 projects on the same subject adding up to an overall amount of 6.9 million EUR.

At this stage, Commissioner Urpilainen has taken the decision not to appoint a Special Envoy for that purpose under her responsibility and the Commission is discussing how best to continue to promote the objectives set out above.

Yours sincerely,

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