

Law and Religion Symposium
Varieties of secularism, religion and the law

Provo, UTAH USA – October 5-7

Religion and European Foreign Policy

The case of Freedom of Religion or Belief

EEAS VI / B

Human Rights and Democracy Directorate



European Union
EXTERNAL ACTION

www.european-council.europa.eu
www.consilium.europa.eu



NON-CONTINENTAL AND OVERSEAS
TERRITORIES OF MEMBER STATES

Åland (FI)
Guadeloupe (FR)
Martinique (FR)
Macao (PT)
Madeira (PT)
Canary Islands (ES)
French Guiana (FR)
Reunion (FR)

The pictorial order is the alphabetical order of
the names of the Member States in their national
language.

The EEAS

November 2009: Catherine Ashton appointed as the EU's first High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). She is charged with coordinating the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The post combines previously separate roles – to make EU foreign policy more consistent and coherent.

The HR/VP is supported in her work by the European External Action Service (EEAS), established by the Lisbon Treaty (signed 2007 / entered into force late 2009) and formed on 1 January 2011 by merging Commission and Council foreign policy departments and bringing in diplomats from national diplomatic services.

Its headquarters are in Brussels and operate 140 delegations around the world.

Most of the Delegations are responsible for EU relations with a single country. Some oversee relations with a group of countries or a region; this is the case, for example, of the Delegation to Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and the Dutch Overseas Countries and Territories. Finally, some EU Delegations are dedicated to organisations –the African Union for example, or the United Nations.

Human Rights

The respect and defense of human rights are core values of the European Union. This commitment shall guide and drive all actions of the EU, both internal and external.

As Catherine Ashton said in her speech to the European Parliament on 13 December 2011, *“the EU works to have human rights running as a **silver thread** through a truly integrated range of external policies”*.

This fully integrated and joined up approach is outlined in the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on “Human Rights and Democracy at the Heart of EU External Action – Towards a More Effective Approach” of Dec. 2011.

June 2012: EU Strategic Framework on Human rights and Democracy reinforcing the EU determination to promote HR and Democracy through its external actions was adopted alongside with its plan of action for priority areas, among which Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

More precisely, it was asked to develop public EU guidelines on FoRB, “building upon **existing instruments and documents**, recalling **key principles**, and containing **clearly defined priorities** and **tools** for the promotion of FoRB worldwide”

FoRB – Not a new issue for the EU

- FoRB : a focus over the last years (Council Conclusion 2009, 2011, specific action plan...). EU resolutions on FoRB – UNGA and Human Rights COuncil
- Why is FoRB important ? **Contextual approach** (against the backdrop of violence on grounds of religion or belief, exploitation of religion or certain beliefs to achieve political gains) – **Conceptual approach** (*“As a universal human right, freedom of religion or belief safeguards respect for diversity. Its free exercise directly contributes to democracy, development, rule of law, peace and stability. Violations of FoRB may exacerbate intolerance and often consitute early indcators of potential violence and conflicts”* – para 1. GL FoRB – “reason for action”)

Guidelines – What for ?

- The Guidelines explain what the international human rights standards on FoRB are, and give clear political lines to officials of EU institutions and EU Member States, to be used in contacts with third countries and with international and civil society organisations.
- They also provide officials with practical guidance on how to seek to prevent violations of freedom of religion or belief, to analyse cases, and to react effectively to violations wherever they occur, in order to promote and protect FoRB in the EU's external action.

Key principles ?

- Definition of FoRB in its broader comprehension, along the lines of article 18 ICCPR and HRC General Comment n.22.
- Overriding principles: Universal character of FoRB; Collective dimension of FoRB; Primary role of the States in ensuring FoRB; FoRB intrinsically linked to freedom of expression and other freedoms.

Priorities ?

- Violence, freedom of expression, Promotion of respect for diversity and tolerance, discrimination, changing one's religion or belief...
- Support and protection for human rights defenders including individual cases; support and engagement with civil society

Tools ?

- EU Delegations monitoring assessment and reporting role, demarches and public diplomacy, political dialogues, EU and EUMS visits, **Financial instruments**, multilateral fora, **training**

Focus on:

- Financial instruments

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

In 2013, a global call for proposal on combating discrimination was launched with a total allocation of 20 million euros, 5 million specifically to support projects on promoting FoRB and combating discrimination on religious or belief grounds.

This is the first time a global EIDHR call has explicitly focused on FoRB, coinciding with the adoption of the EU Guidelines in June 2013.

For this call, the final evaluation and short-listing of selected projects are about to be concluded. In theory between five to 16 projects – depending on the proposed grants ranging between min. 300.000 up to 1 million EUR – will be funded as of 2014 for a period of 18 months to three years.

- Training

Perspectives

- Implementation of the Guidelines
- Enhanced work with EUMS
- FoRB still a high level priority. Hearing of Federica Mogherini before the EU Parliament on Monday 6 October: freedom of religion or belief was quoted as a focus area in the field of human rights (out of three mentioned).

Internet Explorer browser window showing the website <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/>. The address bar shows the URL and search icons. The page title is "European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief". Below the title is the tagline: "Promoting and protecting FoRB in the EU's external actions." The navigation menu includes: HOME, ABOUT US, OUR WORK, OUR REPORTS, MEDIA, FoRB VIOLATION, CONTACT. A large photo shows six people (three men and three women) standing together. Below the photo is the "Home" section with the text: "European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (EPWG on FoRB) is a group of like-minded MEPs dedicated to promote and protect FoRB in the EU's external actions." To the right of the text is a form to "Submit your E-mail address to receive our monthly newsletter." with a "Submit" button. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the date 07/10/2014 and time 13:25.



For recent work on the EU guidelines, cf.
**- Eva Maria LASSEN, EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of
Freedom of Religion or Belief, European Yearbook on Human Rights 2014,
NWV Verlag**

