



European Parliament Intergroup on

FoRB & RT

Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance

President Juncker
European Commission
Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussel
Belgium

08 January 2018

Dear Mr Juncker,

Thank you for your reply of 19 September 2017 to our letter regarding the mandate of the Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief outside of the EU, Mr Jan Figel. The appointment of Mr Figel was warmly welcomed by the Intergroup, given that we had lobbied for the establishment of a special representative, and Mr Figel's mandate goes some way towards achieving our initial aims.

In your letter, you mentioned that you would be interested in exploring ways in which the co-operation between the Special Envoy and the EU Special Representative, could be improved. We have taken the liberty of formulating a few ideas for your reflection.

Firstly, as per the original call of the Intergroup, we feel that the most effective way for any crossover between the EEAS and the Special Envoy to be avoided would be to relocate the office of the latter to the EEAS. As a Special Representative of the EU HR with a focus on freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Figel's work is clearly more aligned with the EEAS than with that of DEVCO. Being positioned within the EEAS would allow Mr. Figel to participate in the core work of the EU on freedom of religion or belief, and inter-religious dialogue.

Secondly, as opposed to the 'rolling contract' that is currently in place for the Special Envoy, we once again would like to suggest for the mandate to be made permanent, so as to show the EU's continued commitment to the protection of freedom of religion or belief, thought and conscience.. This certainty would enable more constructive co-operation between the Special Envoy and the EEAS as it would allow for consistency and better planning between the respective offices.

Finally, we would recommend the establishment of an EU strategy on tackling FoRB issues, developed in tandem with the EEAS. Taking into account the EU Country strategies, specifically those that highlight FoRB as a priority, the Special Envoy and the EUSR on Human Rights could work together in order to come up with a co-ordinated approach towards improving situations in problematic countries, and encouraging best practice sharing from positive examples.

Looking forward to your response.

With kind regards,

Dennis de Jong MEP

Peter van Dalen MEP