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## **EU: The FORB Intergroup welcomes appointment of new FORB Special Envoy**

**The Intergroup FoRB welcomes appointment of new Special Envoy but regrets delay**

European Parliament Intergroup on FoRB & RT (08.12.2022) – The Intergroup for Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance welcomes the appointment of Frans van Daele as new EU Special Envoy for religious freedom. However, for many persecuted believers, this action by the European Commission

**comes too late. According to Intergroup co-chairs Peter van Dalen (EPP) and Carlo Fidanza (ECR), it is now of utmost importance that the new Special Envoy will be effectively facilitated to start his mandate as soon as possible.**

The European Commission announced on Wednesday 7 December that it had appointed the Belgian diplomat Frans van Daele as its new Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU. Van Daele is a former Belgian ambassador to both the US and the EU, and has served in many high ranking diplomatic positions. The appointment follows after a three years standstill, in which the only other Special Envoy, that was appointed in 2021, already returned his mandate after a few months to assume another position in a national government.

According to Van Dalen, the new appointment in itself is to be welcomed, but cannot take away the doubt that the European Commission has cultivated about its commitment to upholding religious freedom: 'By stalling the process of mandating a Special Envoy for religious freedom for almost three years, the Commission has shown that this topic has not had much priority for them. That is highly regrettable, as the space for religious freedom is shrinking in many places around the world. If the EU is really the value-based actor that it claims to be, it must step up its game with regard to defending this fundamental right.'

Fidanza said that the appointment is 'undoubtedly an important, long-awaited achievement that we claim as members of the European Parliament and its Intergroup on religious freedom.' According to the co-chair, the Special Envoy must work with national authorities in countries where people suffer discrimination, must support processes of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and implement measures to counter radicalization and prevent extremism based on religion.

The Intergroup looks forward to working with the new Special

Envoy and intends to invite him to discuss the plans and priorities for his mandate shortly. Van Dalen: 'Now that the appointment is there, it is also important that the Special Envoy is given adequate support, both in terms of funding and staff, to effectively exercise his mandate.' This position has been echoed by the European Parliament on multiple occasions, for example in its resolution on religious persecution of May 3rd of this year.

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