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EU: The EU Guidelines on FORB discussed at the European Parliament

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MEPs tell EU Commissioner Věra Jourová that actions to protect religious freedom are far from enough

MEPs Hölvényi and Bert-Jan Ruissen tell EU Commissioner

Jourová that actions to protect religious freedom are far from enough

The European Times (13.07.2023) – This Friday afternoon, the plenary session of the European Parliament addressed the issue of the EU involvement in the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU. The participants included Commissioner Věra Jourová and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

Věra Jourová speaks at a debate on implementation of EU guidelines on FoRB

Commissioner Jourová, who is responsible for values and transparency, presented the views and actions of the Commission in this regard, highlighting the importance of respecting and promoting religious freedom. She emphasized that the EU is committed to protecting the rights of individuals to practice their religion freely and without discrimination. MEPs from various political groups took part in the debate and shared their perspectives on the issue. The most critical ones for the lack of proper action were MEP György Hölvényi and MEP Bert-Jan Ruissen.

Others emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation in promoting religious freedom both within the EU and externally. They highlighted the need to engage with religious communities and civil society organizations to address religious discrimination and intolerance.

György Hölvényi: “since 2021, people have been killed or kidnapped in 40 countries of the world because of their faith”

The free exercise of religion is primarily a human rights issue. Unfortunately, as the majority of EU decision-makers do not recognize the importance of this fundamental right for

individuals and society, stated György Hölvényi, Christian Democrat MEP in the European Parliament's debate on Thursday, organized on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The vice-president of KDNP Hungary and Member of the European Parliament, reminded, various reports, scientific researches and field experiences show that we live in a time of unprecedented religious intolerance globally. About 84% of the world's population identifies with some religious community. Meanwhile, since 2021, people have been killed or kidnapped in 40 countries of the world because of their faith. We have to underline that the most persecuted religion in the world today is Christianity. During the last year, according to international surveys, 5,621 Christians were killed because of their faith, 90% of the murders took place in Nigeria.

According to the EPP Group's politician, the EU is struggling with a serious credibility problem: despite the dramatic situation, the protection of religious freedom is still not fully part of the EU's external action. Despite the increasing persecution, the European Commission, for example, hesitated for three years to re-appoint the EU Special Envoy responsible for religious freedom outside the EU.

Real milestones are needed in the dialogue with religious communities active in the EU and in third countries. Although the legal framework is in place, no structural dialogue actually takes place before substantive EU decisions are made. MEP György Hölvényi pointed out that the joint action against increasing religious intolerance around the world cannot be delayed any longer.

Bert-Jan Ruissen: "EU actions on religious freedom must finally get off the ground"

The SGP wants the EU to finally take real action on religious freedom. The EU guidelines on freedom of religion have been in

existence for 10 years now but have barely been put into practice.

"That we have these guidelines is of course a good thing. But I have serious doubts about the implementation there," Bert-Jan Ruissen (SGP) said Thursday in an MEP debate he had requested.

In 10 years, the European Commission has never presented the promised reports or held consultations. The position of EU Envoy for Religious Freedom remained vacant for 3 years and support has always been very minimal.

"More really needs to be done, because religious persecution is only increasing worldwide," Ruissen said. "Look at a country like Nigeria, where 50,000 Christians have been killed in the last 20 years because of their faith. Or look at the Indian state of Manipur where many churches have been destroyed and Christians killed this spring."

On Thursday, the SGP therefore made three concrete requests to the European Commission:

- 1) Come up with a solid implementation report of the guidelines in the short term.
- 2) Give the EU Envoy for Religious Freedom a permanent mandate and provide additional staff so that he can do his job properly.
- 3) Come up with proposals to designate June 24, the date on which the guidelines were adopted, as the European Day for Combating Religious Persecution.

"We cannot leave the oppressed Church with millions of believers out in the cold," Ruissen concluded. "I hope and pray that it does not drag on for another 10 years!"

[Further reading about FORB in the EU on HRWF website](#)

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