



**2021/2055(INI)**

5.11.2021

# OPINION

of the Committee on Development

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion  
(2021/2055(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: György Hölvényi

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Development calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas churches can be understood as institutions and faith-based organisations (FBOs), that include any and all kind of religious organisations, communities and associations; whereas the EU maintains an open, transparent and regular dialogue with all churches and organisations, in accordance with Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
  - B. whereas women of belief and persons belonging to religious minorities are particularly at risk of increased discrimination and violence linked to intersectional factors such as gender, caste, ethnic background, power imbalances and patriarchy;
  - C. whereas religious and belief minorities often lack adequate national representation in developing countries, and legislation often excludes the needs and interests of these minorities, with local governments employing a range of extra-legal measures that persecute, delegitimise or stigmatise religious and belief minorities;
  - D. whereas social media platforms are increasingly exploited as spaces for incitement to hatred and violence; whereas religious and belief minorities continue to be subject to hate speech online and offline from individuals across the political spectrum;
- 1. Acknowledges that churches<sup>1</sup>, FBOs and other institutions of belief and religion, and religious associations have a significant role in the social fabric of developing countries;
  - 2. Recalls that freedom of belief and religion are fundamental human rights, enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights; recognises the importance of freedom of belief and religion for an inclusive society and to fully achieve the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
  - 3. Underlines that certain civil society organisations, such as FBOs, religious associations, humanitarian organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are important partners in delivering humanitarian and development assistance to hard-to-reach communities because they are on the front line, they work closely with people on the ground and they know their needs best, and are therefore well placed to deliver aid and make a significant contribution to sustainable development and to achieving the SDGs, in particular SDGs 3 (good health and wellbeing) and 4 (quality education);
  - 4. Further notes that churches, institutions of belief and religion, certain civil society organisations (CSOs) and FBOs deliver in social sectors where shortcomings in state services are experienced; recalls, in this regard, the need to provide FBOs and religious

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<sup>1</sup> With the Treaty of Lisbon, the dialogue between European institutions and churches, religious associations or communities as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations has a legal basis in Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

associations as well as CSOs with relevant activities with adequate official development assistance (ODA) and national budgets in order to support them in carrying out these services, in line with ODA criteria;

5. Recalls that combating discrimination against all minorities regardless of their traditions, belief or religion, and promoting and protecting their rights, contributes vastly to social and political stability, poverty reduction, democratic governance and conflict prevention;
6. Stresses that freedom of religion or belief should be understood as a fundamental right and should be acknowledged as a key component of peaceful and resilient societies; rejects the trend of seeing freedom of religion or belief as inimical to the rights of women, LGBTIQ rights or freedom of expression;
7. Notes that churches and other institutions of belief and religion, FBOs and religious associations can play an important role in mediating peace and contributing to social cohesion and stability;
8. Urges the EU to recognise that religious leaders, FBOs and local NGOs are not only valuable partners in the implementation of humanitarian, development and peace projects, but can also have a role in the design, monitoring and evaluation of such initiatives, thanks to their expertise based on their deep embeddedness in certain local communities, their knowledge of local sensitivities and needs, their direct contact with people experiencing poverty and exclusion, and their long history of providing humanitarian assistance;
9. Acknowledges that certain FBOs and NGOs are among the first organisations on the ground, have many years of experience and provide essential social services and remain on the ground when many other actors leave;
10. Stresses that religious and faith-based organisations, as well as CSOs working in the field of conflict prevention, are frequently present at every stage of the conflict-transformation cycle as they work in peace education and conflict prevention, mediation and conflict resolution, inter-religious dialogue, building networks of local leaders for peace, and post-settlement social reconstruction and trauma work, and are present in the academies and courts where human rights, including religious freedom, are given theoretical depth and cross-cultural grounding;
11. Calls on the Commission and the EU Delegations to engage with local churches, institutions of belief and religion and FBOs in the planning of humanitarian projects and development actions, and calls on the Commission to involve all relevant stakeholders, including churches, institutions of belief and religion and FBOs in the implementation of EU projects; calls on the Commission to adopt special guidance on partnership and cooperation with churches, institutions of belief and religion, and FBOs when it comes to development cooperation and humanitarian assistance;
12. Considers that freedom of religion or belief is only possible with the assurance of personal and human freedom, including the right to sexual and reproductive health and the right to self-determination, regardless of origin or sexual orientation;

13. Notes that young people in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to extremist ideologies, and quality education is one of the key steps to combat radicalisation; notes that extremist movements often exploit the weak presence of the state in rural areas;
14. Recalls that religious leaders have a responsibility and a role in preventing hatred and violence directed towards religious and belief minorities; calls on all churches, institutions of belief and religion, FBOs and religious leaders to promote a tolerant and non-discriminatory discourse, in particular towards vulnerable groups of the population;
15. Denounces all forms of violence and coercion, including public expressions of hostility by religious leaders, perpetrated against women, girls and LGBTIQ persons justified with religious practices or beliefs; calls for the repeal of discriminatory laws enacted with reference to religious considerations that criminalise adultery, that criminalise persons on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, that criminalise abortion in all cases, or that facilitate religious practices that violate human rights;
16. Condemns activities from religious cults addressed to the diaspora from developing countries which use schemes to profit financially from the vulnerabilities of migrant communities in Europe and promote biased worldviews, often integrating homophobia, transphobia and misogyny;
17. Stresses the need for churches, institutions of belief and religion, and religious communities to respect, uphold and promote fundamental human rights for all persons regardless of their belief or religion, without distinction of any kind, such as on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and regardless of gender and sexual orientation; opposes all attempts to jeopardise or deny these rights, especially in relation to the condition of minors, women, the elderly, the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, and other ethnic, social or religious minorities;
18. Recognises that FBOs cover approximately 40 % of healthcare and a significant part of education in sub-Saharan Africa alone, while their role remains mostly unrecognised; underlines that churches, institutions of belief and religion and FBOs are contributing to human development;
19. Emphasises that healthcare and education provided by FBOs, NGOs and local civil society actors should be accessible to all persons in need, regardless of their belief or religious background; condemns, in the context of the SDGs, restrictions on sexual and reproductive healthcare by religious institutions and civil society organisations and associations, in particular when it is required due to medical conditions;
20. Underlines that certain FBOs play a strategically important role in influencing and impacting members of their communities to come to a position of understanding and advocacy on crucial issues such as HIV, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and the empowerment of girls and women;
21. Stresses that the persecution of minorities on grounds of religion or belief is often intertwined with some other forms of discrimination, in particular with regard to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and caste; calls on the EU to ensure that any

discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief that intersects with other drivers of exclusion, marginalisation and poverty is clearly mapped and addressed comprehensively;

22. Notes that churches and other institutions of belief and religion, as well as FBOs, are frequently the only providers of healthcare and other social services in remote areas of certain developing countries and in conflict-prone settings;
23. Welcomes the activities of churches and other institutions of belief and religion, inter-faith initiatives and religious leaders in the field of conflict management and mediation, and in fostering reconciliation, dialogue and peace; notes the importance of including religious and belief minorities as part of the EU's external push for peace, democracy and sustainable development; highlights that inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue is often crucial, notably in conflict areas, to foster peace and reconciliation and an inclusive society on all levels;
24. Underlines the importance of civil society initiatives in tackling the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief and religion, and in promoting a holistic approach that encompasses human rights, conflict resolution, human development and inter-faith and inter-religious initiatives;
25. Strongly deplores that non-religious, secular and humanist organisations are facing growing persecution, including unprecedented waves of incitement to hatred and killings, in a number of countries worldwide; denounces that countless individuals and CSOs are under assault for peacefully questioning, criticising or satirising religious beliefs; stresses that this ongoing violation of their freedom of thought and expression occurs across geographic and cultural borders, including within EU Member States;
26. Calls on the EU and its partners to consider mapping the role of religion in specific conflicts, as well as the identification and engagement with existing positive actions of religious leaders in peace-building actions, conflict analysis and prevention, and the listening and assessment of multiple voices representative of both majority and minority religious groups;
27. Deplores the ongoing rollback and regression of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, especially those marginalised on the grounds of superstition (e.g. witchcraft), and the regression of the rights of LGBTIQ persons within the EU and elsewhere, notably under the guise of religious principles or doctrine; notes that intersectional factors, including religion and belonging to minority groups, increase the risk of discrimination under this regressive trend;
28. Calls on the Commission and the Council to make the fight against the persecution of religious and belief minorities a priority in the programming of activities related to EU development assistance, in line with the areas of cooperation for geographic and thematic programmes of NDICI-Global Europe, and to prioritise, promote and protect freedom of belief and religion;
29. Notes that the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion endangers not only human lives, human rights and human development but also cultural heritage; calls on the Commission to integrate the protection of cultural heritage in all the

relevant dimensions of the EU toolbox, notably in development cooperation, and calls for appropriate financial support for the protection of cultural heritage in the programming of NDICI-Global Europe;

30. Recognises that LGBTIQ communities are a part of faith traditions; recognises that like all human beings, LGBTIQ persons have a right to freedom of expression, speech, belief and religion; reiterates the importance of the role that religious authorities can play to ensure that religion and tradition are not utilised to discriminate, criminalise or exclude persons based on their sexual orientation and gender identity;
31. Stresses that the EU should take into account the concrete challenges that religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities often face when accessing humanitarian assistance due to marginalisation, active targeting on the ground or weak socioeconomic positions; calls on the Commission to assess the effective access of minorities to humanitarian assistance and to ensure that its humanitarian policy does not overlook minorities;
32. Points out that violence against religious minorities during conflict can also make them vulnerable to further attacks in refugee settings due to misinterpretations of the humanitarian principles of neutrality and universality and widespread assumptions held about religion as either non-essential or divisive;
33. Underlines that the delivery of humanitarian assistance must be free from any kind of discrimination, and strongly condemns any discrimination based on religious affiliation in the distribution of humanitarian assistance;
34. Calls on the EU and its Member States to strengthen legal and institutional protection mechanisms to secure the human rights of members of religious and belief minorities and of any person in a vulnerable situation, including women and girls, persons of different ethnicities or castes, elderly and disabled people, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and LGBTIQ persons, so that they are fully protected on the basis of their fundamental rights and are not subjected to discrimination because of their belief or religion;
35. Condemns the use of religion and the instrumental interpretation of religion to the detriment of human rights in certain legal systems and through the institutional persecution and criminalisation of religious and belief minorities;
36. Is of the opinion that humanitarian actors should be trained in the particular sensitivities of religious and belief minority groups in displacement settings to provide more inclusive aid and protection for a range of refugee populations;
37. Stresses the need to eliminate discrimination against religious and belief minorities in the field of employment, education, access to justice and effective remedies, housing and healthcare including sexual and reproductive healthcare in line with the SDGs; underlines the need to work with human rights institutions and organisations to monitor compliance, examine complaints, and contrast laws and policies that discriminate or persecute minorities on the grounds of belief or religion;
38. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to mainstream, in the EU's external actions, the protection of freedom of belief and

religion, as well as the right to change or abandon one's religion and belief without coercion, notably in developing countries;

39. Calls on the Council, the Commission, the EEAS and Member States to work with non-EU countries towards the adoption of measures to prevent and fight hate crimes, in full compliance with international standards on freedom of expression and freedom of belief and religion;
40. Calls on the EU to develop adequate accountability, reaction and sanction mechanisms to combat effectively violations of freedom of belief or religion, including discrimination or legal restrictions based on belief or religion in its partner countries, as well as any kind of impediment to freedom of thought, belief or religion, freedom of association and freedom of expression; furthermore calls on the Commission to combat serious violations of human rights as provided for by the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime;
41. Recalls that the political and legal separation of religion and state is a prerequisite for the full enjoyment of human rights, democracy and the rule of law; calls on the EU to ensure that its development programmes and budget support for national and local authorities in non-EU countries are consistent with the principles of secularism, including in the field of education, and strictly refrain from reinforcing government legislation and policies that favour one belief or religious group over others;
42. Recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated persecution and violence against religious and belief minorities in some developing countries and has made them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and mortality due to unequal access to adequate medical care;
43. Denounces the use of freedom-restricting measures as part of pandemic-prevention measures to discriminate against religious and belief minorities; calls on developing partner countries to develop inclusive social protection systems that do not discriminate against minorities on religious or belief grounds or on any other grounds in terms of equal access to healthcare, food, humanitarian assistance or education; calls on the EU to better equip itself with instruments that enable it to more effectively target the most vulnerable populations, including religious and belief minorities;
44. Acknowledges the special role that religious leaders, FBOs and faith communities play in COVID-19 education, preparedness and response; notes that religious leaders are integrated into their communities through service and compassionate networks and are often able to reach the most vulnerable with assistance and health information and identify those most in need; notes that religious leaders are a critical link in the safety net for vulnerable people within their faith community and wider communities;
45. Points out that in some countries, the main sources of discrimination against minorities come from non-state actors; calls on the Commission and Member States not to focus exclusively on government-based discrimination and to work with partner countries in tackling the causes of societal discrimination against minorities, with special regard to hate speech;
46. Calls on the Commission to link the issue of religious freedom with trade treaties



concluded between the EU and its external partners;

47. Condemns the human rights violations, sexual abuse, sectarianism and financial misconduct carried out by religious missions and leaders in several developing countries.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	27.10.2021
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+ : 13 - : 4 0 : 9
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou, Hildegard Bentele, Dominique Bilde, Catherine Chabaud, Antoni Comín i Oliveres, Ryszard Czarnecki, Gianna Gancia, Mónica Silvana González, György Hölvényi, Rasa Juknevičienė, Beata Kempa, Pierfrancesco Majorino, Erik Marquardt, Janina Ochojska, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Michèle Rivasi, Christian Sagartz, Marc Tarabella, Tomas Tobé, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Bernhard Zimniok
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Stéphane Bijoux, Caroline Roose, Patrizia Toia, Carlos Zorrinho

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

13	+
ID	Gianna Gancia
PPE	Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou, Janina Ochojska, Tomas Tobé
Renew	Stéphane Bijoux, Catherine Chabaud, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou
S&D	Mónica Silvana González, Pierfrancesco Majorino, Marc Tarabella, Patrizia Toia, Carlos Zorrinho

4	-
The Left	Miguel Urbán Crespo
Verts/ALE	Erik Marquardt, Michèle Rivasi, Caroline Roose

9	0
ECR	Ryszard Czarnecki, Beata Kempa
ID	Dominique Bilde, Bernhard Zimniok
NI	Antoni Comín i Oliveres
PPE	Hildegard Bentele, György Hölvényi, Rasa Juknevičienė, Christian Sagartz

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention