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## **Intergroup welcomes the inclusion of FoRB action points in the adopted EU Action Plan on Human Rights**

***Intergroup's recommendation for specific FoRB action points were included in the Action Plan***

EP Intergroup (20.07.2015) - The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance welcomes the adoption of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights. The Intergroup is particularly pleased by the inclusion of specific freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) action points. The Intergroup Co-Presidents, on behalf of the Intergroup, had written to the High Representative in May expressing their concern that the draft Action Plan failed to include FoRB action points.

Paragraph 12 which is dedicated to freedom of religion or belief reinforces the EU's commitment to protecting religious or belief minorities in the world. It includes the Intergroup's recommendations to the EU, in its Annual Reports 2013 and 2014, to raise FoRB violations with third countries, cooperate with international partners, deepen awareness of FoRB in the EU institutions and for greater dialogue with religious or belief leaders and organisations. Intergroup Co-President Dennis de Jong said *"I am pleased that the EU included FoRB action points and has taken on board some of our recommendations. Still the inclusion of the action points is not enough. The EU must now show political will to implement the action points by taking heed of other recommendations we made in our Annual Reports such as better policy coherence and EIDHR funding for religious or belief organisations."*

The Intergroup also expresses its disappointment that although Paragraph 31 focuses on the implementation of EU Guidelines, the EU failed to include a specific FoRB action point on the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Intergroup believes that the Guidelines are an effective tool but that the EU should ensure it undertakes the actions it committed itself to in the Guidelines. Intergroup Co-President Peter van Dalen said *"At an event two years ago in the European Parliament to mark the adoption of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief, we spoke about how important the Guidelines are and how they would enable the EU to better promote FoRB. However the Guidelines can only be effective if they are a live document. The EU should have taken the opportunity of the Action Plan to have a specific action point on the implementation*

of FoRB Guidelines and a commitment that diplomats in EU delegations, in countries where FoRB is most restricted, are informed of the Guidelines."

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## **ENAR calls on European Parliament to address anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe**

ENAR (29.06.2015) -

*European Network Against Racism (ENAR) Chair Sarah Isal made the following statement at a hearing organised by the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee on Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Hate Speech. The hearing took place at the European Parliament on 29<sup>th</sup> June.*

Anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in Europe, as its resurgence after the Holocaust proved. It is with great concern that we have seen a general increase over the last years. The Community Security Trust (CST) in the UK reported an increase of 60% of violence committed against Jews in the EU between 2008 and 2014. According to the FRA survey, Jews in Europe are increasingly afraid of being verbally harassed (46%) or physically attacked (33%). In Belgium, the equality body reports that complaints received for anti-Semitic incidents have increased from 83 in 2013 to 130 in 2014 (+56%).

In France, a 2013 report from the French National Human Rights Institution reveals that anti-Semitism is not always understood properly, is often seen either as a phenomenon of the past or as isolated acts from either violent extremists or neo-Nazi groups, but is rarely seen as a structural phenomenon.

The extent of anti-Semitism in Hungary came to the forefront when, in November 2012 a Jobbik MP called in the Hungarian Parliament for a list of Jewish civil servants, after which there was no immediate outcry from other government officials. Similarly in Greece, extremely anti-Semitic rhetoric and literature have been associated with elected members of the Golden Dawn party. Understanding the complexity in which anti-Semitism manifests itself is key to combatting it. For instance, Hungary and Greece feature high levels of indigenous anti-Semitism and neo-Nazi activity, but lower levels of physical violence compared to countries such as France and Belgium in which anti-Semitism is much less socially acceptable, but violence is more common.

Bullying and prejudice at school are frequent for Jewish children. In Hungary, there are increasing reports of parents moving their child to Jewish schools following incidents in mainstream education. Jewish children also experience discrimination or segregation in education.

There has also been a worrying increase of Islamophobic incidents over the last years.

In France, the number of attacks against Muslims was multiplied by 6 following the Paris attacks compared to the same period in 2014, according to the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF). In Sweden, attacks on mosques have increased. In Italy, official Islamophobic reactions including by the Venetto educational authorities, are frequent.

Muslim women are particularly targeted by violence. Because public debates focus on Muslim women and the wearing of the headscarf, veiled women are reduced to their religious signs in the view of many and are thus becoming privileged targets of Islamophobia.

ENAR shadow reports and FRA reports also highlighted that the heightened security context since the events of 11 September 2001 has contributed to experiences of direct and indirect discrimination by ethnic and religious minorities in Europe. In particular Muslim communities, and those perceived as belonging to Muslim communities, have been amongst the most vulnerable, at times victims of backlash from wider society after terrorist attacks and then victims of policy responses to these attacks.

Muslim people tend to experience the most severe labour market discrimination, as evidenced ENAR Shadow Reports. Muslims, and in particular Muslim women, also face discrimination due to restrictions to the right of wearing religious symbols in national laws and practices, for example in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain.

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are the products of different histories and ideologies; and they cover diverse realities and types of manifestations which are specific to each.

However, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are both specific forms of discrimination and racism in which attitudes, behaviours, institutional patterns and policies reject, exclude, vilify, or deny equal treatment to people, based on their real or perceived Jewish or Muslim background. They have the same concrete implications on the physical, psychological or financial situation of individuals.

Despite the EU and national equality legislations, the specific direct and structural discrimination faced by Jews and Muslims imply that existing legal instruments and policy measures are not enough to ensure equality of outcome.

The response to anti-Semitism and Muslim hatred should therefore deal with these common and separate factors. ENAR calls the LIBE committee to include in its resolution (or resolutions) on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia that the European Commission should ask Member States to adopt specific national strategies with concrete policy goals, on the model of the National Roma Integration Strategies, to address anti-Semitism on the one hand, and islamophobia on the other. Policy goals should be specific to each national context and address each fields of life, in particular employment and education.

History has shown time again that there is a connection between hate speech and hate crime. hate speech, which is the topic of one of the panel today, creates a climate in which perpetrators of racist violence feel that the society condone their behaviour so it is imperative that hate speech should be addressed. In some cases, and in the respect of international human rights law, they should even result in criminal proceedings.

We also hope that racist, anti-Semitic and islamophobic violence feature in the European commission bilateral talks with member States on the enforcement of the EU's Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia.

There are many more issues that should be addressed, and we hope there will be in the context of the panel discussions. In particular in terms of larger context, we should keep in mind that to prevent discrimination and violence, more long-term social investment in education, housing, employment and health policies , as well as in intercultural dialogue and social cohesion programmes, are crucial to stop the massive disenfranchisement of sizeable parts of the population, which nurtures violent extremism.

It is important to tackle these forms of racism and hatred - as well as anti-Gypsyism and Afrophobia - jointly, so as to show all forms of racism and hatred are of concern to all, and are equally important to address. Now is time for cooperation and alliance building to keep in mind the greater cause, beyond attempts from some to pit communities against one another. In the context of the creation of a new group in this house which gathers

those who would like to promote racist, xenophobic, islamophobic or anti-Semitic ideas, policies and practices, this is a matter of urgency.

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## **Intergroup and United States Ambassador for Religious Freedom discuss freedom of religion or belief**

Intergroup on FoRB & RT (16.06.2015) - European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief & Religious Tolerance Co-President Peter van Dalen MEP, on behalf of the Intergroup, met with the United States Ambassador for Religious Freedom Rabbi Dr Saperstein in the European Parliament. Intergroup Co-President Peter van Dalen and Ambassador Rabbi Dr Saperstein previously met when the Intergroup visited Washington in September 2014 to meet with US government agencies and Congress to discuss freedom of religion or belief.

At the meeting today, Peter van Dalen spoke about the Intergroup's activities and the upgrading of the former Working Group to an Intergroup. Ambassador Saperstein was heartened by the upgrading to an Intergroup and the Parliament's commitment to ensuring the European External Action Service promotes FoRB.

The primary focus of the meeting was to discuss efforts to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief. Both agreed that economic development, through economic incentives, contribute to religious or belief tolerance and pluralism. However they stressed that the economic incentives need be balanced with human rights concerns.

Ambassador Saperstein also touched on his recent visits to Iraq, Burma, Pakistan and Vietnam and the State Department's latest Annual Report which covers 192 countries. The Annual Report is due to be released in the next six weeks.

At the end of the meeting Peter van Dalen gave Ambassador Saperstein the Intergroup's Annual Report on Freedom of Religion or Belief and spoke about the event held in the European Parliament in collaboration with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Ambassador Saperstein on receiving the report said "*to have so many members of the Parliament come together to enhance religious freedom across the globe is a source of hope and support for all those facing religious intolerance and restrictions on their religious liberty.*"

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## **European Parliament Intergroup welcomes the adoption of EP human rights report and Emergency Resolution on attacks against Assyrians**

***The report however neglects to mention a wider range of religious or belief groups***

Intergroup on FoRB & RT (15.03.2015) - The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance welcomes the adoption by the European Parliament of its Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy and the

Emergency Resolution on 'Recent attacks and abductions by Daesh in the Middle East, notably of Assyrians' in the Strasbourg plenary session.

The chapter on freedom of religion or belief in the Annual Human Rights and Democracy report and the Emergency Resolution reinforces the Parliament's commitment to protecting religious or belief minorities in the world. Intergroup Co-President Dennis De Jong said 'I welcome the report and the emergency resolution which clearly set out the Parliament's position in regards to FoRB and contain recommendations for the European External Action Service (EEAS) on mainstreaming human rights and freedom of religion or belief in EU foreign policy.'

The report included for the third consecutive year a detailed section on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Although the Intergroup is pleased to see the inclusion of paragraphs on persecution of religious or belief minorities by ISIS, Christian persecution and the continued systemic human rights violations of Rohingya Muslims in Burma, the Intergroup is concerned by the omission of the persecution of other religious or belief minorities such as Baha'is, Hindus, atheists and other religious or belief minorities. The Intergroup reiterates that freedom of religion or belief is one and the same right for all.

The inclusion of the section on FoRB was in part due to the amendments tabled by the Intergroup which were supported by other Members of European Parliament. In particular the Intergroup amendments included calling for the 'High Representative/Vice President and the EEAS to engage in a permanent dialogue with NGOs, religious or belief groups and religious leaders' and for the European Union (EU) to promote 'freedom of religion or belief within international and regional fora including the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE) and other regional mechanisms.' Intergroup Co-President Peter van Dalen added 'The inclusion of these important amendments highlight the importance of the Conference of Presidents decision to upgrade the Working Group to an Intergroup and the significant role the Intergroup can play in promoting FoRB from within the European Parliament.'

At the same time the Intergroup expressed disappointment that two of its amendments were not accepted, notably an appeal for the 'the EEAS and Member States to involve representatives from the European Parliament and from civil society in FoRB trainings' and for 'the EEAS to establish a horizontal focal point for religion or belief matters.' Both amendments were recommended by the European Parliament Working Group on FoRB in its 2013 annual report.

Although these amendments were not approved, the Intergroup will continue to promote these recommendations in future reports and resolutions of the Parliament.

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## **5 facts about religious hostilities in Europe**

Pew Research Center (27.02.2015) - While Europe is not the region with the highest level of religious hostilities – that remains the Middle East-North Africa region – harassment and attacks against religious minorities continue in many European countries. Indeed, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center, hostilities against Jews in particular have been spreading.

Here are five facts about social hostilities – i.e., hostilities perpetrated by individuals or social groups rather than by governments – that tend to target religious minorities in Europe:

<sup>1</sup>In 2013, the most recent year covered by the study, harassment of Jews in Europe reached a seven-year high. Jews faced harassment in about three-quarters (34 of 45) of

Europe's countries. In France, for instance, three men attacked a teenager who was wearing a traditional skullcap, or kippa, in Vitry-Sur-Seine, reportedly threatening to "kill all of you Jews." In Spain, vandals painted a large swastika on the side of a bull ring in the city of Pinto, along with the words "Hitler was right." And in the town of Komarno in southern Slovakia, metal tiles in the pavement honoring a local Jewish family killed in the Holocaust were destroyed when vandals poured tar over them.

2 Muslims experienced harassment in nearly as many European countries (32 of 45) as Jews. By comparison, the Middle East and North Africa was the only region where Muslims faced more widespread harassment, dealing with hostility in 15 of that region's 20 countries. In Germany, bloody pig heads were found at a site where the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was planning to build Leipzig's first mosque. And in Ireland, several mosques and Muslim cultural centers received threatening letters, with one of the letters stating: "Muslims have no right to be in Ireland."

3 In two-thirds of the countries in Europe, organized groups used force or coercion to try to impose their views on religion in 2013. Sometimes this activity is aimed at dominating a country's public life with the group's particular perspective on religion through means such as online intimidation of minority religious groups. Other times, it is focused on a particular religious group, such as anti-Semitic postings and anti-Muslim rhetoric on online forums. In Italy, for example, four men were sent to prison after they published lists of Jewish residents and businesses on neo-Nazi websites. This type of social hostility was more prevalent in Europe (30 of 45 countries, or 67%) than in any other region.

4 Women were harassed over religious dress in about four-in-ten European countries (19 of 45) – about the same share as in the Middle East-North Africa region (where it occurred in eight of 20 countries, or 40%). This includes cases in which women were harassed for either wearing religious dress or for perceived violations of religious dress codes. In France, for example, two men attacked a pregnant Muslim woman, kicking her in the stomach and attempting to remove her headscarf and cut her hair; she suffered a miscarriage in the days following the attack. And in Italy, two Moroccan men attacked a young Moroccan woman, beating her for "offending Islam" when she refused to wear a headscarf.

5 Individuals were assaulted or displaced from their homes or places of worship in retaliation for religious activities in roughly four-in-ten European countries. In Poland, for example, arsonists set fire to the door of a mosque in Gdansk. And in Greece, arsonists attacked Jehovah's Witnesses' houses of worship and several informal mosques in multiple cities during the year.

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## **Defamation laws in the EU**

<http://www.freemedia.at/ecpm/defamation-law-report.html>

HRWF (26.02.2015) – On 25<sup>th</sup> February, MEPs Sophie in 't Veld and Virgine Rozière, co-chairs of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics organized a conference at the Parliament on the issue "Freedom of speech: the right to blasphemy?".

The guest-speakers were Pierre Galand (President of the European Humanist Federation), Jean-Pierre Leguay (Freemason, Grand Orient de France), Jacob Mchangama (Director of the Copenhagen-based think tank Justitia), Fr. Patrick H. Daly, (General Secretary of the COMECE), Jonathan Romain (British Reform Rabbi) and Scott Griffen (Director of the Press Freedom Programmes at the International Press Institute in Vienna).

In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack, the purpose of this meeting was to have an open discussion on the unlimited right to freedom of speech on one hand, and the desire to prohibit blasphemous or religiously hurtful speech on the other hand. On this occasion, Scott Griffen, presented the report "Defamation laws in the EU."

In this report, the International Press Institute (IPI) presents the findings from its in-depth research into defamation law and practice in the European Union (EU). The findings are presented in the form of a comparative analysis of defamation law in the 28 EU member states and 5 of 6 official EU candidate countries. The report broadly evaluates the extent to which EU defamation laws meet international standards on freedom of expression and highlights key issues for future advocacy work.

The findings are based on IPI's analysis of data on defamation laws in each of these countries, in turn based on data collected in 2014 by IPI and by researchers at the School of Public Policy's Center for Media and Communications Studies (CMCS) at the Central European University in Budapest and their partners at the SHARE Foundation in Belgrade, and in consultation with a team of national legal experts.

This report is part of IPI's broader advocacy, training and capacity-building work on defamation in the EU, supported with co-funding from the European Commission under its European Centre for Press and Media Freedom pilot programme and the Open Society Foundation (OSF). The goal of IPI's work is to raise awareness among EU policymakers and the general public on defamation laws and their effect on press freedom, as well as to inform journalists about their rights under international principles and thereby empower them to continue delivering news in the public interest. In 2014, IPI held a series of workshops for journalists and lawyers on defamation and international standards in selected EU and candidate countries.

This report is accompanied by two related IPI documents. The first of these presents the results of an IPI perceptions study that collected the personal views and experiences of EU journalists on defamation laws and their application. The results bear witness to the dangerous chilling effect that defamation laws can have on the free flow of information and offer a mandate for continued training of journalists on such laws.

The second document summarises relevant international standards on freedom of expression and defamation, as originally developed in 2000 by the London-based civil society organisation ARTICTLE 19. It also provides a briefing on the viewpoint on those standards expressed by leading international legal and intergovernmental bodies, with particular focus placed on the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

Both documents are available online at IPI's project website: [www.freemedia.at/ecpm](http://www.freemedia.at/ecpm).

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Citations

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