

Mission Report: Visit to Egypt of Jan Figel (25-29 November 2018)

Special Envoy for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) outside the EU

Programme

The visit of Jan Figel was carefully organised and “accompanied” by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, including meeting with Government authorities, religious leaders and institutions as well as cultural visits in Cairo. On the agenda, meetings took place with Minister of Awqaf, Dr Mohamad Mokhtar Gomaa, Pope Tawadros II, [REDACTED] Foreign Minister in charge of Human Rights, [REDACTED]; [REDACTED] Evangelical Presbyterian Church, [REDACTED]; [REDACTED] the Coptic Catholic Church [REDACTED]; the [REDACTED] of Mission at the Embassy of the Holy See, [REDACTED]. The meeting with [REDACTED] of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives was cancelled at the last minute. A visit of Al Azhar took place hosted by [REDACTED] of the Grand Imam, Sheikh [REDACTED]. The MFA organized a lunch talk with CSOs and intellectuals. Jan Figel debriefed Head of Missions on his visit and met in the EUD representatives of HRDs. The EUD facilitated meetings between the assistants to the SE, [REDACTED], and EU project partners including the “Institute Dominicain d’Etudes Orientales (IDEO)”.

Conclusions

This report complements the Flash Report in annex, adding possible follow up and details on the meetings. The long-awaited visit to Egypt has been fruitful and opened up space for engagement with authorities, religious actors and civil society. The Special Envoy wishes to thank the proactive engagement of [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and his colleagues in the EUD, which made the positive outcome possible.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[Redacted text block]

Recommendations

In the short term

[Redacted text block]

In the medium term, first ideas to be further explored include:

- [Redacted text block]
- | [Redacted text block]
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Highlights from the meetings

Foreign Minister (AFM) for Human Rights and International Humanitarian and Social Affairs Ambassador Ahmed Ihab Gamaleldin.

This meeting took place at the end of the visit, in the presence of the [REDACTED]. SE Figel presented his mandate expressing his hope for strengthened dialogue. He noted that guaranteeing space, security and justice for the civil society is essential for democracy and encouraged Egypt to build fair partnership with civil society. He spoke on the limits of the use of customary mediation. He noted positive development on the new law on churches but expressed concerns about its slow implementation. He raised the issue of de-radicalization, notably in prisons, as an area where more co-operation between Egypt and the EU could be considered. He sought Egypt's views regarding a proposal to bi-annualize UNGA/HRC resolutions on "freedom of religion or belief" and "combatting religious intolerance" led by the EU and the OIC respectively.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SE Figel welcomed the Ministry's increased attention on human rights and noted that there is currently momentum for EU and Egypt to work together; he expressed his wish to continue the dialogue and return soon to Egypt.

Minister of Awqaf, Dr. Mohamed Mokhtar Gomaa

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SE Figel [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He stressed the importance of education and dialogue in fighting extremism. To this end, he perceived the cooperation between Egyptian religious leaders as a great model. He emphasized the important role of Egypt for the region. He also noted that Egypt's policy of equal citizenship could function as an example for other countries in the region. He stressed the close ties between Egypt and Europe and described the "Near East" as mentally and culturally close to Europe. During the meeting, SE Figel also raised the unsolved issues relating to the treatment of minorities and the need to find a balancing connection between freedom and responsibility, rights and duties, faith and reason.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Visit of Al-Azhar

Al-Azhar was established in 972 and counts a total of 2.5 million students in Egypt, out of which 500.000 at the university level, and around 40000 coming from +/-110 countries. Programmes include secular topics (very good reputation for hard sciences faculties) and Islamic faculties. Tuition is free. The four schools of Islamic thoughts are taught and compared. Al Azhar operates also through institutes in different countries (16 in Africa and 7 in Asia), a network of around 800 teachers, using a standard curriculum. Al-Azhar develops close relations with Sudan, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Bosnia. Very few connections so far with Morocco and Jordan.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] guided a tour of

¹ A flagship project is the "House of the Egyptian Family (HEF)" set up in 2011, in the aftermath of an attack against Christian church in Alexandria, jointly by the Grand Iman and all other Christian leaders to renew religious discourse, promote moderateness, develop common values, diffuse interreligious tensions as they arise (now it counts 20 centres open in the country) . Another initiative is the Awareness Academy training Egyptians and foreigner imams for two months on how to face terrorism. In Nigeria, they trained 350 imams on how to deal with Boko Haram.

the well-equipped Observatory on Radicalisation, where experts work using many European, Asian and African languages to spot on the net radicalization messages.

Pope Tawadros

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Human Rights Defenders

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], President of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt and General Director of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOS)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Rev. Mgr. [REDACTED], Apostolic Nunciature in Egypt. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Highlights from the debrief with the Heads of Missions [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Visit of the Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales (IDEO) [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] accompanied by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had an interesting discussion with the [REDACTED]. The Institute is very well known for its exceptional library on Islam and other religions (150.000 books) and for its activities of research and outreach. IDEO implements a project funded by the EU on "Providing Tools for Critical Thinking in Islamic Studies."

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Meeting with Arch. [REDACTED], Episcopal Anglican Diocese of Egypt and the North of Africa
[REDACTED] met the Archbishop and his team in charge of the implementation of the project “Communities Richer in Diversity (CRID)” funded under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) of the EU. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Meeting with [REDACTED] on social sectors and on education in the EUD. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Noted by [REDACTED]