



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### German and EU leaders back Tibet access, religious freedom

Read online: <https://savetibet.org/german-and-eu-leaders-back-tibet-access-religious-freedom>

March 13, 2020

Momentum is continuing to build in Europe in support of Tibetans' right to select their own religious leaders—and against China's efforts to cut Tibet off from the outside world.

High-ranking officials in the German federal government and the European Commission, which is EU's politically-independent executive arm, recently put out statements backing Tibetans on both of those crucial issues.

Their statements, which follow major legislative victories in the United States, show that China's policies in Tibet are attracting greater international rebuke—and that foreign governments are increasingly willing to speak up for basic freedoms and justice for Tibetans.

#### Dalai Lama's succession

In response to a question from German Member of Parliament Margarete Bause about the Dalai Lama's succession, Niels Annen, minister of state at the Federal Foreign Office, released a statement (p. 25) saying, "The Federal Government is of the opinion that religious communities may regulate their affairs autonomously."

Annen added: "This includes the right to determine their religious leaders themselves".

Annen also said the German government recognizes the Dalai Lama as the head of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Chinese government, however, has been trying to undermine the Dalai Lama's role within the religion.

China—which annexed Tibet in 1959 and continues to rule over it with an iron fist—has already said that when the Dalai Lama, now 84, eventually passes away, it will appoint its own Dalai Lama to replace him.

#### Tibetan Policy and Support Act

In response to this flagrant assault on Tibetans' religious freedom, the US House of Representatives in January passed the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which will make it official US policy that only the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community can decide how to handle his succession.

The bill will also sanction any Chinese officials who name their own Dalai Lama in the future.

The International Campaign for Tibet is now working to get the bill passed in the Senate and signed into law by the president.

## More European support

The statement from Annen adds to the growing chorus in Europe saying that Tibetan Buddhists alone have the right to decide the Dalai Lama's succession plans.

In January, Belgian Foreign Affairs and Defense Minister Philippe Goffin said, "it is logically up to the Tibetan religious community to designate [the Dalai Lama's] successor without interference from the temporal authorities."

And late last year, Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Stef Blok said, "The government is concerned about interference by the Chinese government in religious matters. According to the Chinese authorities, the reincarnation process is subject to Chinese legislation. The position of this cabinet is that it is up to the Tibetan religious community itself to appoint a future successor to the Dalai Lama."

Recently, five members of the European Parliament (from four different political groups) Petras Auštrevičius, Aušra Maldeikienė, Hannes Heide, Francisco Guerreiro and Petra De Sutter submitted a written question to High Representative of the European Union Josep Borrell asking about the position of the EU on the succession of the Dalai Lama and concrete measures the EU intended to take in order to address this issue.

According to the EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on June 24, 2013 (in particular its paragraph 19), the communities have the right to perform "acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs. These rights include but are not limited to, legal personality and non-interference in internal affairs, including the right (...) to select and train leaders (...)"

## Access to Tibet

Responding to a question from Member of the European Parliament Isabel Santos about access to Tibet, Josep Borrell, vice president of the European Commission, said "The Commission will continue to call on the Chinese authorities to allow reciprocal access to Tibet" as part of the European Union's human rights dialogue with China.

Borrell, who is also high representative of the Union for foreign affairs and security policy, noted that his predecessor, Federica Mogherini, previously called on Chinese authorities to grant reciprocal access to Tibet last year.

Borrell also said the European Union has raised concerns about China's violations of Tibetans' religious freedom and human rights.

## Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act

Tibet is one of the most isolated areas in the world, with China preventing foreign journalists, diplomats and ordinary citizens from entering Tibet, even though Chinese citizens travel freely throughout the United States and European countries.

In late 2018, the US Congress passed—and President Trump signed into law—the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which denies entry to the US for the Chinese officials directly responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet.

ICT is now working to make sure the State Department fully implements RATA.

RATA has also had international success. In 2019, a British lawmaker introduced a bill mirroring RATA in the UK Parliament.

And a Canadian senator introduced a motion last year calling for Canada to receive reciprocal diplomatic access to Tibet without limitation.



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America  
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | [info@savetibet.org](mailto:info@savetibet.org)

ICT Europe  
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265  
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266  
[icteurope@savetibet.nl](mailto:icteurope@savetibet.nl)

ICT Deutschland e.V.  
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435  
Berlin, Germany  
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086  
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087  
[info@savetibet.de](mailto:info@savetibet.de)

ICT Brussels  
11, rue de la linière | 1060  
Brussels, Belgium  
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10  
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32  
[info@save-tibet.eu](mailto:info@save-tibet.eu)