



Dr Riina Kionka: EU Ambassador to the Republic of South Africa

Riina Kionka arrived in Pretoria in October 2019 to head the Delegation of the European Union to South Africa.

Previously, she was chief foreign policy advisor to the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, appointed in 2014. Prior to this Dr Kionka led the Central Asia Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS). Before this she led on Human Rights for the EEAS and earlier at the EU's Council Secretariat (from 2007), representing Secretary General / High Representative Javier Solana on human rights within the framework of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Predating this, Dr Kionka deputised for the Director dealing with the United Nations, the Americas, counterterrorism and human rights at the Council Secretariat (from 2004).

Before her move to the EU Institutions, Dr Kionka worked at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following a number of years at the ministry in Tallinn, which saw her start off as Chief of Policy Planning (1993) and then move onto the role of political director (1995), Dr Kionka's first external posting was as Estonia's Ambassador to Germany (2000).

In 2004 she returned to Estonia to take up the reins at the foreign ministry as Undersecretary for EU Affairs.

Dr Kionka started her working career as a research analyst on Estonian affairs for Radio Free Europe at the Radio Liberty Research Institute in Munich, Germany (1989–1993).

Dr Kionka holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Columbia University in New York City (2000) while having commenced her academic pursuits with a BA in International Relations and German Literature at Michigan State University (1983).

Dr Kionka is married to Amb Lauri Lepik, a former Estonian Ambassador to the United States, to NATO, the Ukraine and Moldova. They have two grown up children who live abroad, while their two cats and an English bulldog have joined them in South Africa.

Last, but not least, Dr Kionka is a Hugh Masekela fan who enjoys winding down at the end of the day with her trumpet in hand.