



PRESS RELEASE

Intergroup on the Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience

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Brussels - The European Parliament's Intergroup on the Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience (Intergroup FORB) welcomes the appointment of former EU Commissioner Mairead McGuinness as EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union.

"It was high time", according to the co-chairs of the Intergroup, Slovak MEP Miriam Lexmann (EPP) and Dutch MEP Bert-Jan Ruissen (ECR). The co-chairs expressed their satisfaction that the position has finally been filled after having remained vacant for over a year.

"The prolonged vacancy did not convey the impression that religious freedom is high on the European Commission's list of priorities. At the same time, there is significant work to be done for the EU Special Envoy worldwide, such as addressing the serious violence and persecution that Christians in Nigeria and surrounding countries face, the situation of religious minorities in Syria, or the anti-conversion laws in Pakistan and India." said Bert-Jan Ruissen.

Miriam Lexmann further emphasised the importance of the role of the Special Envoy in today's increasingly turbulent political landscape. "In the rough sea that characterises today's geopolitical reality, the protection of freedom of religion or belief, which is a fundamental human right, must remain our compass. It is precisely in moments of global uncertainty and conflict that the European Union must stand firm in defending human dignity, religious freedom, and the values on which the European project was founded."

Intergroup FORB

The Intergroup FORB has called for the urgent reappointment of the EU Special Envoy since December 2024 and reiterated this call throughout 2025 and 2026. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed in several letters to the Intergroup FORB her commitment to filling this post. The Intergroup FORB consists of 35 MEPs from the political groups EPP, ECR, Renew, and S&D.

Role of the Special Envoy

The post of EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief was created in 2016 following a call from the European Parliament after the horrific murders of Christians by ISIS in the Middle East at that time. Slovak politician Ján Figel', who served as a European Commissioner from 2004 to 2009, was appointed in 2016 as the first EU Special Envoy. He was involved in negotiations in Pakistan for the release of Asia Bibi. His mandate ended in 2019. Two years later, Belgian senior diplomat Frans van Daele was appointed as the second EU Special Envoy.