



To: Mr. Magnus Brunner, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration
Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the Commission

Strasbourg, 18 December 2024

Subject: The EU's mandate to protect the right to freedom of religion, belief and conscience and the appointment of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU

Honourable Mrs Von der Leyen,
Honourable Mr Brunner,

As per the meeting of the Conference of Presidents 11 December 2024, the Intergroup on the Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience is re-established in the European Parliament. As members of that intergroup, we would like to appeal to the European Commission and the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration to secure, protect and promote the fundamental right to freedom of religion, belief and conscience as part of the Commission's mandate and the mandate of the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration.

The right to freedom of religion, belief and conscience is a universal human right engrained in Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The right to freedom of religion or belief forms the cornerstone of democratic societies as it protects the most fundamental aspects of humanity and human dignity, the right to hold or not hold a religion or belief, the right to change a religion or belief and to alone or in community with others (in public or private), manifest that religion or belief, "in worship, teaching, practice and observance". Freedom of conscience protects one's moral compass, to live accordance one's deeply held beliefs.

However, we remain deeply concerned about the rising violations against groups in the exercise of their right to freedom of religion or belief outside of the European Union and in many parts of the world. This increase in attacks against religious groups or non-believers outside of the EU requires strong, united, proactive, and robust responses in the protection of Article 10 (of the EU Charter) by the European Commission. As stated by former Vice-President Schinas, during a "Debate and Commission Statement on 'The Rise of Religious Intolerance in Europe'," - "we all have a moral duty to protect religious freedom". The creation in 2016 of the mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU was a significant positive step in this direction and should continue to serve to achieve this purpose.

The designation of a Special Envoy communicates that promoting freedom of religion or belief is a central goal of EU foreign policy. Moreover, with appropriate resources, the Special Envoy could ensure that EU policy relating to freedom of religion or belief is as effective and coordinated as possible. This is particularly essential at a time when many EU Member States, third countries and multilateral organizations have similarly appointed high-level officials on freedom of religion or belief.



We therefore call upon and recommend that the European Commission President and the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration execute their mandates to fulfil this moral duty and further strengthen the protection and promotion of the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief through:

1. **The timely continuation and appointment of a high-level, fully endowed, and qualified *Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union* for a full period of 5 years.** This appointment should occur soon after the commencement of the work of the new Commission to ensure continuity in the protection of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.
2. We recommend that the Special Envoy is provided with sufficient funding, term-planning and autonomy to execute rigorous work in protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief outside the EU.

Yours sincerely,

Co-chairs of the Intergroup on the Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience



Miriam Lexmann MEP



Bert-Jan Ruissen MEP