



To: the President of the European Commission

Concerns: the appointment of a new EU Special Envoy for the promotion of the freedom of religion or belief outside the EU

Brussels, 26 September 2022

Dear President of the European Commission,

When you addressed the European Parliament in your State of the European Union on 14 September, you referred to your recent visit to the Taizé community as a source of inspiration. The fact that so many young people from very different backgrounds are still connected through a passion for something greater than themselves should serve as a blueprint for how we go about the future of the EU, is what you told us. We, as Members committed to promoting religious freedom, very much appreciated this rather religious reference in your address.

We fully agree that a belief in something greater than yourself, which is the core element of many religions and beliefs, can be a great source of inspiration. It is therefore that we regret that millions of people worldwide do not have the chance to freely confess, practice and also renounce a certain religion or belief, because they face severe persecution when doing so. Fortunately, the European Union has repeatedly committed to promoting and protecting the freedom of religion or belief worldwide. The appointment of Ján Figel' as first EU Special Envoy for the promotion of the freedom of religion or belief outside the EU in 2016 was a milestone in this regard.

However, after the mandate of Mr Figel' ended and the mandate of your Commission started in 2019, the post of Special Envoy has remained vacant. Unfortunately, the appointment of Mr Stylianides proved to be a very temporary resolve, as he left the post before even getting started. Ever since, we as Members concerned about the deteriorating state of religious freedom around the world, have been asking your Commission for a quick reappointment. To date, nothing has happened. Even though the name of Mr Mario Mauro has been circulating for months now, we still have not seen an official appointment.

We urgently ask you to formalize the new appointment as soon as possible. We are afraid that any longer delay will negatively impact the effectiveness of the Special Envoy, as the end of this mandate is slowly approaching. Moreover, we fear that no new appointment will lead to the de facto abolishment of this post in general. That would be a great mistake. The freedom of religion or belief, in the words of the previous Special Envoy, is not more or less important than other human rights, but serves as a litmus test for all of them. That is why the EU must stay committed to promoting and protecting this right in a high-level and structural format.

Appointing a new Special Envoy for promoting the freedom of religion or belief outside the EU will put the EU in a position to give more people around the world a chance to share an experience similar to that of all those young people at Taize. We sincerely hope you will recognize the urgency of this matter, and we are looking forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Peter van Dalen MEP
Carlo Fidanza MEP
Joachim Kuhs MEP
Michaela Šojdrová MEP
Ladislav Ilčić MEP
Miriam Lexmann MEP
Lefteris Christoforou MEP
Bert-Jan Ruissen MEP
Izabela Kloc MEP
Charlie Weimers MEP