



Der Vorsitzende - The Chairman - Le Président

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 14 September 2021

Dear President Ursula von der Leyen,

Last May, the EPP Group warmly welcomed the appointment of Mr Christos Stylianides as the new EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief as a clear signal of our determination to protect the rights of all faiths and beliefs around the world. This appointment came after months of insistence and encouragement from our end as we were convinced the EU could not abandon such a crucial role in these turbulent times.

On behalf of the EPP Group, we congratulated you for this courageous move and we applauded the choice of Mr Stylianides. His experience, conviction and dedication, were of paramount value to the EU in this role.

Since its creation in May 2016, and despite its limited mandate and resources, the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief undertook remarkable work in addressing challenging situations in many countries where freedom of thought, conscience and religion were - and still are - seriously threatened or violated.

However, we have all learned of the recent nomination of Mr Stylianides to lead the new ministry on addressing the impact of climate change in Greece, which leaves the position of the EU Special Envoy vacant.

We would like to reiterate the importance of filling this position as a matter of urgency and we call upon you to consider nominating a new Special Envoy without undue delay and reinforcing its institutional mandate and capacity to help Europe sharpen its focus on the protection of religious minorities. In light of the recent tragic developments, including in Afghanistan, the EU has all interest to make use of this tool as religious freedom is instrumental for peace among communities.

Please rest assured of our determination and continuous support on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Jan OLBRYCHT, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group

Manfred WEBER, Chairman of the EPP Group

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