

MEP Daniel Freund, ASP 04 F 251, Rue Wiertz 60, B-1047 Brussels

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the Commission

Mr. Magnus Brunner
Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration



European Parliament

1 December 2025

Appointment of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU

Dear Madam President,
Dear Commissioner Brunner,

Given that the appointment of the next Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU (the “Envoy”) is apparently imminent, we – a cross-party group of MEPs – wish to express our priorities for the candidate selection, as well as our concerns about the transparency of the process.

Protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all is of fundamental importance. However, siloing this right in a mandate separate from the EU Special Representative for Human Rights creates several risks. In particular, a candidate that is not carefully chosen may fail to properly situate the right to FoRB in relation to other human rights or to counter its misuse to undermine other rights. The [EU Guidelines on FoRB](#) explicitly highlight this risk of instrumentalisation, stating that FoRB ‘is sometimes invoked to justify’ human rights violations, which ‘often affect women, members of religious minorities, [and] persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity’. The [Parliament](#) has also noted that women and LGBTIQ+ people experience discrimination and abortions are being banned ‘in the name of religion’.

Previous conduct by an appointee has reaffirmed the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach to FoRB. [Several MEPs](#) and civil society organizations raised concerns about then-Envoy Ján Figel’, who co-hosted and participated in events by anti-LGBTQI+ and anti-abortion groups. As the [European Ombudsperson](#) pointed out, this also risks undermining the Envoy’s work protecting those persecuted for their religion or belief.

Given that the right to FoRB is interdependent with other fundamental rights and we believe that the candidate selection should reflect that, we urge you to:

- Prioritise candidates with deep, demonstrable expertise in the international human rights law framework;
- Exclude any candidates whose public record or affiliations are incompatible with the universality and interdependence of human rights, especially equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people and sexual and reproductive rights;
- Appoint a candidate with a strong record of promoting freedom of religion or belief for all, including non-believers, in full coherence with other human rights and European values.

We also wish to express our concerns about the lack of transparency around the appointment process and the work of the Envoy. The Commission has failed to consult the Parliament or civil society on candidate selection or to share publicly candidate lists or selection criteria. The mandate and work plan are not publicly available and the Envoy does not report their activities to the Parliament or publicly in any systematic or regular fashion. [The Parliament](#) has previously recommended that the Envoy provide annual reports on their work and thematic priorities, as well as a comprehensive report at the end of the mandate, which has not been heeded by the Commission.

In order to enhance the accountability and effectiveness of the Envoy, we urge you to:

- Establish a transparent and accountable selection process, which includes the publication of criteria and candidates as well as the meaningful consultation of Parliament and civil society.
- Establish a clear framework to ensure that the mandate operates in a transparent manner, which should encompass public-facing work plans and regular, detailed reporting on activities to Parliament and the public.

We also want to reiterate the Parliament's calls in [2019](#) and [2024](#) that the Commission carry out a transparent and comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and added value of the position.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Freund, MEP (Greens/EFA) and Sirpa Pietikäinen, MEP (EPP Group)

Co-signatories:

Raquel García Hermida-van der Walle, MEP (Renew)
Jutta Paulus, MEP (Greens/EFA)
Brando Benifei, MEP (S&D)
Hanna Gedin, MEP (The Left)
Matjaž Nemec, MEP (S&D)
Tilly Metz, MEP (Greens/EFA)
Damien Carême, MEP (The Left)
Evin Incir, MEP (S&D)
Gabriele Bischoff, MEP (S&D)
Benedetta Scuderi, MEP (Greens/EFA)
Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus, MEP (S&D)
Nathalie Loiseau, MEP (Renew)
Alice Kuhnke, MEP (Greens/EFA)
Maria Noichl, MEP (S&D)
Lina Gálvez, MEP (S&D)
Mounir Satouri, MEP (Greens/EFA)