

Brussels, 05. 05. 2025
Ares (2024) 9145929

Dear Honourable Members,

Thank you for your letter regarding the European Union's role in protecting 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.

I would like to reaffirm my commitment to defending and promoting freedom of religion or belief both within and outside the EU. As you rightly point out, at a time where hate speech and intolerance are on the rise, we are witnessing an increasing number of violations of these fundamental freedoms, in many regions of the world. The work of the Intergroup on the Freedom of Religion, Belief, and Conscience is more vital than ever, and I highly appreciate your dedication to ensuring that these issues remain a priority on the EU agenda.

The Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU has made an important contribution. During his mandate as Special Envoy, Mr Frans van Daele brought significant advances, particularly in addressing the situation of religious minorities in the Middle East and Pakistan. I remain committed to continuing this important work and intend to renew the position of Special Envoy.

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We understand the urgency of filling this position as swiftly as possible to ensure continuity in our efforts. The new Special Envoy can build upon Mr van Daele's achievements and further strengthen our efforts to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief. The new Special Envoy will continue engaging with religious and non-confessional actors, including in the context of the Article 17 TFEU dialogue with churches, religious, as well as philosophical and non-confessional associations.

I greatly appreciate your continued engagement and advocacy on this matter, and I look forward to working together to uphold and advance these fundamental freedoms.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ursula von der Leyen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ursula von der Leyen