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European Commission renews the mandate of the Special Envoy for freedom of religion

"We decided today to renew the function of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU," tweeted the European Commission Vice-President **Margaritis Schinas** who is the European Commissioner for Promoting the European Way of Life. *"Together with Ursula von der Leyen the forthcoming appointment shows our determination to ensure the rights of ALL faiths and beliefs are respected across the world,"* he added.

Following weeks of mixed communications on the topic, the announcement has been welcomed as good news by politicians, human rights groups and **religious freedom organisations**.

"We are encouraged by the reappointment of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU. The current health crisis allows limitations on freedom of religion or belief to increase worldwide. The EU has done the right thing in showing renewed commitment to this fundamental human right.," said Adina Portaru, Legal Counsel for **ADF International** in Brussels.

The **European Evangelical Alliance** told *Evangelical Focus* recently that "not renewing the mandate of the EU Special Envoy would give the wrong signal to those countries where FoRB is currently at risk".

The President of the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, **Manfred Weber**, also welcomed the announcement: "We pushed for it (...). Freedom of religion is under pressure in the world, whether for **Christians in China** or **Muslims in India**, Europe must do more to protect this fundamental freedom".



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Previously, the decision not to confirm the role of the EU Special Envoy was criticized by religious leaders from different faith. **Chief Rabbi** of Moscow and President of the Conference of European Rabbis, Pinchas Goldschmidt, called the move “the wrong signal” at a time “in which Jews and other religious minorities are increasingly being targeted online and offline by extremists, and the free exercise of religion is being undermined.” Speaking from the Muslim community, the chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, Aiman Mazyek, also voiced criticism of the previous Commission’s move.

Role of the Special Envoy

The Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU was introduced in 2016 in order to protect freedom of religion or belief on behalf of the EU worldwide. The Slovakian politicians and former EU Commissioner **Jan Figel** was appointed as first Special Envoy. Part of the mandate included visits to countries with some of the most violent religious persecution in the world in order to help facilitate dialogue and response plans. The Special Envoy played a decisive role in helping [Asia Bibi safely leave](#) Pakistan after she was acquitted of blasphemy charges. There has been robust support for the continuation of the mandate, voiced by the [European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance](#), [national special envoys](#), [scholars](#), and [civil society](#).

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