



*Commission of the Bishops' Conferences
of the European Union*

H.E. Ms. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Cc. Mr Margaritis Schinas
Vicepresident of the European Commission

Mr Bjoern Seibert
*Head of Cabinet of the President of the
European Commission*

Brussels, 2 June 2021

EU Special Envoy on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief outside the EU

Dear President von der Leyen,

I am writing to you to express, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of the EU, our satisfaction with the appointment of Mr. Christos Stylianides as “EU Special Envoy on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief outside the EU”, an important position to promote a fundamental right and a core value of the EU, which is under threat in many parts of the world.

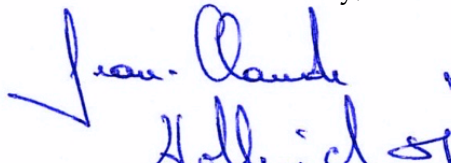
Already as Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Mr. Stylianides was highly respected as the "humanitarian face of the EU", opening fresh spaces for cooperation with Churches and Faith-Based Organisations in humanitarian activities as well as for inter-religious dialogue leading to a better protection of human rights and mutual understanding in conflict situations.

His appointment as EU Special Envoy will give voice to voiceless individuals and communities whose freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are violated, being subject to intolerance, discrimination and, in some cases, even, persecution. Since its creation in May 2016, and despite its limited mandate and resources, the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief made a remarkable work in addressing challenging situations in many countries where freedom of thought, conscience and religion is seriously threatened or violated.

In this regard we would like to recall the need of strengthening the EU mechanism dedicated to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in third countries, which should be supported with reasonable and adequate human and financial resources that enable the EU Special Envoy to carry on his high responsibility, and with a more ambitious and defined mandate and capacity, as the European Parliament has expressed.

Therefore, it is our hope and kind request to you that the EU Special Envoy have your institutional and financial support to be able to duly perform his responsibility, in the context of a long-term perspective, that confirms the EU as a relevant voice in supporting human rights and vulnerable individuals and communities around the world.

Yours sincerely,

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+ Jean-Claude Card. Hollerich SJ
Archbishop of Luxembourg
President of COMECE