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## **EU: Catholic Italian to be the new EU Commissioner for Religious Freedom**

### **Catholic Italian to be the new EU Commissioner for Religious Freedom**

**CNE (04.07.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3yYDPlm> –** Mauro, a Roman Catholic, is currently the chairman of Pololari per I'Italia, the small Christian Democratic Party in Italy, Idea reports. He also works as a senior advisor and runs an international relations study centre.

He was an MP between 1999 and 2013. During that time, he

already drew attention to the situation of persecuted Christians in the Middle East. In 2011, he was critical of a motion of the EU ministers of Foreign Affairs. The bill was about religious freedom but did not specifically mention Christian minorities, Domradio reports.

In an earlier interview with L'Osservatore Romano, Mauro said that he saw the prevention of persecution of Christians as an important part of his political career with Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, of he was also part at the time. There he was also active against discrimination and hate towards Christians, Catholic News Agency reports.

At another occasion, he said that religious freedom is a test for other freedoms and rights. "The persecution of Christians throughout the world is one of the greatest challenges to human dignity", he stated, according to Catholic News Agency.

That Mauro is actively involved in combatting religious persecution, is shown by his actions for the Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi. She was sentenced to the death penalty, but is now free again.

## **Political career**

In 2013, Mauro became a member of the Italian Senate. The same year, he founded the Christian Democratic Party Popolari per I'Italia.

Mauro was Minister of Defense for ten months during the Enrico Letta administration.

Before becoming a politician, Mario Mauro was a history teacher. He graduated from philosophy and literary studies at the Catholic University of Sacro, Do Rzeczy writes.

Originally, the new Commissioner for Religious Freedom came from the Italian town of San Giovanni Rotondo. He belongs to the Catholic lay movement Comunione e Liberazione, Domradio writes.

Mauro is married to his wife Giovanna and has three children, his website reads.

Mauro succeeds Christos Stylianides, the previous Commissioner for Religious Freedom.

Stylianides resigned after only four months in office. He served from May 2021 until September of that same year. He then favoured the position of minister in Greece.

### **Preventing discrimination**

As Commissioner for Religious freedom, Mauro will be responsible for preventing discrimination, promoting peace-building contacts, inter-religious processes and initiatives to reduce radicalisation in countries outside the EU, according to Do Rzeczy.

However, his influence outside the EU as a special envoy will be limited, proponents of the function of the special envoy fear. An often-heard critique is that the commissioner needs more means to fulfil his job well. Domradio writes. The reason for that is the lack of financial and human resources.

### **Not a European priority**

The function of the Commissioner for Religious Freedom does not seem to be a priority for the European Commission. Before Mauro's successor, Stylianides, was appointed, the position had been vacant for ten months. Only after other politicians, among others, pressured the Commission it attempted to fill the vacancy.

However, after Stylianides resigned, it took another nine months before a successor was found.

### **Evangelical Focus Comment**

A sign of the low support this post has had in the EU institutions is that it has taken **10 months for the European Commission to appoint a new person** for the post.

In **September 2021**, the Christos Stylianides left after only working five months in the position. The Greek representative had been appointed in May 2021, after over half a year of vacancy, earning the protests of human rights groups and the European Evangelical Alliance.

Jan Figel was the first EU Special Envoy, appointed in May 2016. He completed his mandate in 2019 and was praised for his initiatives. Nevertheless, he was not re-appointed. The European Commission did not appoint a successor for Figel until the second half of 2021.

*Photo: Mario Mauro. Photo Facebook, Mario Mauro*

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