



Strasbourg, 12 December 2007

To Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering

President of the European Parliament

To Mr. José Manuel Durao Barroso

President of the European Commission

To Mr. José Sócrates

President in office of the Council of the European Union

To Mr. Janez Janša

Incoming President in office of the Council of the European Union

Re: Dialogue with churches and non confessional organisations under art. 15 EU Treaty

Dear Sirs,

In recent years, the three EU institutions have organised regular High Level meetings with religious leaders. On different occasions we have expressed our concern about the format of these meetings. The EU institutions should be seen to be neutral, and no organisation, religious or otherwise should have privileged access to the EU institutions and have privileged influence on the decision-making process.

Freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are fundamental rights in the European Union. They can only be guaranteed in a secular context. It is unbecoming for any of the EU institutions to provide an exclusive platform to any particular grouping, including religions, in particular as the majority of European citizens are not religious or no longer practice their religion. Thus millions of individual citizens do not have a voice in the dialogue.

The new Reform Treaty has integrated the paragraph from the Constitutional Treaty stipulating an "open, regular and transparent" dialogue with churches and non confessional organisations.

Churches and non confessional organisations have an important voice in the dialogue with civil society. Therefore the dialogue with churches and non confessional organisations should meet the same criteria as the dialogue with other civil society organisations, notably on transparency. Therefore we reiterate our recommendation that such meetings take place in public and that the agenda and meeting documents are published beforehand and the minutes and the conclusions and the names of the participants afterwards.

Furthermore, the dialogue must be inclusive and representative. So far, the meetings were attended by religious leaders only, representing the most conservative strands of religions and churches, and all male. We therefore recommend to:

- Invite leaders of non confessional organisations, such as the European humanists
- Invite representatives of liberal, progressive religious groupings
- Ensure that women are represented too and demand an effort from the participants in this respect

Finally we suggest an agenda that deals with issues such as racism, xenophobia, extremism, gender discrimination and violence against women, homophobia and violence against LGBT people, freedom of speech and freedom of religion, discrimination in education, sexual and reproductive health, and the role churches and non confessional organisations can play in addressing these issues.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the All Party Working Group on the Separation of Religion and Politics,

Sophie in 't Veld
Chair

Karin Resetarits
Vice Chair

Magda Kosane Kovacs
Vice Chair