



Dear Mr César das Neves

Support of Religion by the European Union

I am writing to draw your attention to alarming signs that the European Union is sliding without acknowledgement from neutral dialogue with religions and non-confessional organisations into clear support for religion combined with continuing refusal to give equal access to non-confessional organisations such as ourselves.

I will cite four recent developments.

(a) The three presidents of the EU institutions held a meeting on 5 May with large numbers of Christian, Jewish and Islamic leaders. Despite our representations, of which you are aware, we were refused participation in the meeting. No justification for this discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was offered, despite its clear breach of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

(b) On 21 November the French Presidency of the EU Council met representatives of the churches to discuss a wide range of matters relevant to the European Union. My letter to M. Nicolas Sarkozy of 28 November (of which I sent you a copy) has so far received neither acknowledgement nor reply.

(c) On 19 December the French Presidency held a meeting with delegations from member states that were required to include one rabbi, one imam and one priest with a view to fostering dialogue with the “three principal religions”. My letter to M. Sarkozy of 2 December (of which I again sent you a copy) has similarly not yet even been acknowledged.

(d) EU representatives are participating in a large evangelical Christian rally in Brussels between 29 December 2008 and 2 January 2009 that is being run by the Taizé community.

Specifically on the last, would you please inform me in detail of the full extent of EU participation and support? (From the website at http://www.taize.fr/en_article7749.html it seems to be considerable, involving apparently at least two members of the Commission as well as President Barroso’s meeting with the Taizé leader on December 15.) Would you please specify the legal basis on which such extensive support is justified? Would you please arrange for copies of any speeches made by Commissioners or other representatives of the EU

at the meeting or associated events to be published on the EU website and/or forwarded to me?

Would you please also indicate where the requirements for openness and transparency have been fulfilled in respect of President Sarkozy's two meetings – where can I read reports or minutes of the meetings, find lists of those who attended, and so on? (I would draw your attention to the fact that the conference on 19 December was excluded from the Presidency's list of engagements at <http://www.ue2008.fr/PFUE/lang/fr/accueil/activites>.) Is there a website for the EU Council Presidency that records dialogue with religion and non-confessional bodies comparable to BEPA's at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/activities/dialogues_religions/index_en.htm?

In general, may I ask what mechanisms the EU has adopted to regulate its contacts with representatives of religious and non-confessional lifestances? How does it seek to ensure that a balance is maintained – particularly in the face of the announced opinion of the Roman Catholic bishops, through their President in November last year that the considerable privileges they already have in the EU “are indeed necessary but they alone are in our view not enough to satisfy the offer of an open, transparent and regular dialogue”?

Any balance appears at present to be sadly lacking. We feel increasingly driven to surmise that the European Union no longer regards itself as a secular institution. This is precisely what we foresaw in campaigning for many years against the adoption of what is now Article 17 of the Maastricht Treaty. The churches may have lost membership on a massive scale over recent decades but they retain huge and authoritarian institutional power. Any privileged dialogue with them – even with our nominal inclusion – was bound to result in the EU in effect bolstering their position, lending them significance they do not justify, and (most importantly) impairing its own legitimacy in the eyes of that significant proportion of the population of Europe who have rejected religious belief.

I look forward to your reply. Meantime, I offer you our best wishes for Christmas – a mid-winter festival with roots far older than Christianity!

Yours sincerely

David
President

Pollock