



European Humanist Federation

international non-profit association under Belgian law

Fédération Humaniste Européenne

association internationale sans but lucratif de droit belge

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President Jose Manuel Barroso
European Commission
B1049 Bruxelles
Belgium

18 March 2010

Dear Mr President

With the Lisbon Treaty now ratified, the long-anticipated requirement for an open, transparent and regular dialogue with the churches and the philosophical and non-confessional organisations of Europe has come into effect. The dialogue, rather than being discretionary, is now mandated under Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Your personal commitment to non-discrimination is well known and instanced by your support for the draft non-discrimination directive. The EU's similar commitment, as shown by previous moves against discrimination and by its support for intercultural dialogue on an open and broad basis, is equally well known. It is now reinforced by the Union's imminent accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, which under Article 14 forbids discrimination in the application of Convention rights, including those under Article 9 related to religion and belief. Such considerations, as you will be aware, have led the European Court of Human Rights to endorse the principles of secularism in cases such as the recent one of *Lautsi v Italy*.

It appears important to us, therefore, that the Treaty-mandated dialogue between the Union and the organisations representing the religious and non-religious populations of Europe should be conducted from the start on a non-discriminatory basis. This is a principle that I am sure you would endorse. It must mean, as you will agree, that organisations should be admitted to and participate in the dialogue on the basis of non-discriminatory criteria that do not include (save in extreme cases) the substance of their beliefs.

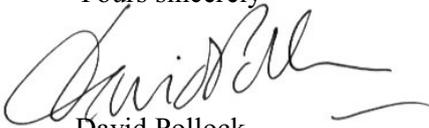
Plainly the principle not only allows but requires meetings between representatives of the Union and bodies representing a single religion or non-religious lifestance, so long as they do not aggregate show undue favour to any particular belief. However, in our view the principle also entails that great care is necessary when the EU invites representatives from a range of beliefs to prestigious high-level meetings. In such cases, a non-discriminatory approach must require that those, such as the European Humanist Federation, that represent non-religious beliefs should be included. The position of minority non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism should also be considered, albeit they are numerically less significant, whereas the non-religious population, of whose interests (I think you will agree) we are the most obviously representative organisation, make up perhaps one in three of the population of Europe.

For these reasons we ask that, if you and Mr Buzek (should he choose to follow Mr Pöttering's recent practice) decide to call another of the annual meetings you have held in May in each the past five years with leaders of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, you should extend your invitation to include ourselves, if not others also.

A meeting with the Presidents of the European Commission and of the European Parliament is a distinct mark of favour. Exclusion from any such meeting for no discernible reason of principle suggests that one's beliefs are discountenanced in a way that can only be seen as discriminatory. I am sure you would agree that such discrimination would be out of place in a European Union committed to becoming (as under the current programme) a 'union of citizens'. You will also be aware, from our many constructive engagements with the EU over recent years (such as those listed in my letter of 9 April 2009 to Mr César das Neves) that we should be able to make a positive contribution to such a meeting.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



David Pollock
President

Copies to:

Mr Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament

European Buddhist Union
Hindu Forum Europe
United Sikhs - branches in Europe

Michael Cashman MEP
Nikolaos Chountis MEP
Andrew Duff MEP
Edite Estrela MEP
Adam Gierek MEP
Anna Hedh MEP
Joe Higgins MEP
Mary Honeyball MEP
Ian Hudghton MEP
Patrick le Hyaric MEP
Veronique de Keyser MEP
Sarah Ludford MEP
Miguel Martinez Martinez MEP
Edward McMillan-Scott MEP
Bill Newton Dunn MEP
Justas Vincas Paleckis MEP
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Eva-Britt Svensson MEP
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