

## For the neutrality of the institutions of the European Union

28 January 2002

Enshrining any reference to God in the Preamble to a future Constitution of the Union would prove divisive and would discriminate against the increasing number of citizens who no longer subscribe to religious precepts. Non-religious people hold convictions which are no less worthy of respect than those held by "believers".

Any reference to God or religious traditions is wholly inappropriate, because unlike the situation in the ancien régime states, the law is no longer given to humanity under the cover of some religious power but is enacted by the citizens' democratically elected representatives. This is a basic principle of every parliamentary democracy which, in Europe, differs fundamentally from the "religious tradition".

The birthright of every society is a cultural legacy deriving from a variety of different sources that make it what it is. Europe's culture has been forged by many different sensitivities and schools of thought.

The European Humanist Federation (EHF) rejects any reference to heritages that are divisive, and proposes that reference be made to "the cultural heritage of European history".

The EHF requests the inclusion in article 1 of the Constitution of the statement that "the Union is based on the indivisible and universal principles of the dignity of all men and women, of freedom, of equality and of solidarity; it is grounded on the principle of democracy and the rule of law".

The EHF considers that article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" but requests that the right to profess no religion be explicitly stated.

The EHF defends the separation of Church and State, and requests that article 3 enshrines the notion that the Union guarantees the secular character of its institutions.

The Union's institutions should develop in a manner that is neutral with regard to the convictions of its citizens; they must not introduce any discrimination and ensure respect for freedom of all convictions, religious or non-religious, without the need to resort to any transcendental message of any kind whatsoever.

What is essential today is to enlist the active participation of every citizen in the common enterprise of building up a democratic Europe. Citizenship of the Union cannot be based on religious convictions or on messages that rely on any notion of transcendence.

The EHF is opposed to the inclusion into the Treaty of Declaration 11 of the Final Act of the Amsterdam treaty according to which "the European Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States", whose sole purpose is to preserve the privileges of certain Churches in the Member states.

What concerns the Humanists and Secularists in the European Humanist Federation, as well as Europeans who hold religious convictions, is the need to prevent the European institutions from once again causing a rift between the citizens, between those who believe in heaven and the increasingly large numbers of those who do not.