

Brussels, 12 July 2005

José Manuel Barroso meets European religious leaders

Today José Manuel Barroso will be meeting over 15 European religious leaders (see attached list) as part of the ongoing dialogue between the European Commission, religions and churches. Coming as it does five days after the attacks in London, this meeting with representatives of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths confirms the need for Europe to unite in the cause of peace, to combat terrorism and to eliminate its causes.

"More than ever Europe must show that it is united in its religious diversity to reject and condemn terrorism on its soil", declared Mr Barroso before welcoming his guests from different religious traditions. He went on to say, "This approach must go hand in hand with the efforts of the developed world to combat poverty and create a fairer world. We took another important step towards achieving that goal last week at Gleneagles. Europe must continue on this course. Spiritual movements have an important role to play in helping us to keep this at the forefront of our minds."

Today's meeting is one of a series of regular talks between the President of the European Commission and a variety of partners from religious, spiritual and humanist circles.

In addition to terrorism, added to the agenda by recent tragic events, the President is planning to discuss with his guests the outlook for European integration, particularly in the light of the challenges posed by the process of ratifying the draft European Constitution.

Necessary dialogue

"If we have learned one thing in recent weeks, it is the need for Europe to take action through practical measures with which the public can identify", Mr Barroso said in response to the positive and encouraging result of Sunday's vote in Luxembourg. A period of reflection and discussion was needed to restore the ties between Europe and its citizens and "the religious communities could, like the European Commission, make a major contribution to this dialogue".

As the guardian of the common interest, the Commission has taken upon itself the task of responding to the legitimate concerns that people have regarding important questions such as Europe's borders, the European social model, and the type of growth and protection they wish to enjoy. The Commission does not intend to conduct this discussion alone but in partnership with each Member State and in close liaison with the representatives of social movements and spiritual and religious communities.

Ongoing dialogue

The aim of this ongoing dialogue between the European Commission and religions, churches and non-confessional organisations, which began during the Presidency of Jacques Delors, is to intensify the process of European integration. Discussions are traditionally organised, through conferences, seminars, meetings and other events as well as debriefings, four times a year following European Councils and under the aegis of the BEPA (Bureau of European Policy Advisers).

Mr Barroso will be meeting representatives of the non-confessional organisations in November.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ANGLICAN CHURCH

- The Rt. Rev'd & Rt. Hon. Richard Chartres, Bishop of London

ECUMENICAL ORGANISATION

- Revd Thomas Wipf, Vice President of the Conference of European Churches
- Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission of the CEC

ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES

- Sir Zaki Badawi, Member of the Board of the European Islamic Conference
- Anas Schakfeh, President of the Islamic Communities of Austria

JEWISH ORGANISATIONS

- Great Rabbi Aba Dunner, Secretary General of the Conference of European Rabbis
- Great Rabbi Albert Guigui, Permanent Representative of the Conference of European Rabbis with the EU
- Maram Stern, Permanent Representative of the World Jewish Congress with the EU

ORTHODOX CHURCHES

- His Eminence, Emmanuel, Metropolitan of France and Permanent Representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the EU
- His Excellency, the Bishop Athanasios of Achaia, Permanent Representative of the Church of Greece with the EU
- His Excellency, Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev of Podolsk, Permanent Representative of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate with the EU

PROTESTANT CHURCHES

- Prelate Stephan Reimers, Representative of the Council of the Protestant Churches in Germany to the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union
- Sabine von Zanthier, Permanent Representative of the EKD with the EU

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

- His Excellency, Bishop Joseph Homeyer, President of COMECE Monsignor
- Noël Treanor, Secretary General of COMECE