

Brussels, 5 May 2008

## **Presidents of Commission, Council and Parliament discuss climate change and reconciliation with European faith leaders**

**On the initiative of the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, an informal dialogue took place on 5 May in the headquarters of the European Commission, bringing together around twenty high-level representatives of Christianity, Judaism and Islam in Europe. The meeting was co-chaired by European Commission President Barroso, Slovenian Prime Minister and current President of the European Council, Janez Janša, and the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering. This year's meeting focused on two major challenges facing the European Union: Climate Change and Reconciliation.**

This was the fourth annual meeting with religious leaders and the second involving the Presidents of the three EU institutions. The initiative was launched by President Barroso in 2005.

This year, discussions centred around "*Climate change: an ethical challenge for all cultures*". President Barroso declared: "Climate change obliges all of us to take urgent action. Each part of civil society must contribute to ensuring a sustainable future of our planet. Thanks to their outreach and role in our societies, religions and communities of belief are well placed to make a valuable contribution in mobilising them for a sustainable future. Let's unite in our common endeavour and prove that the preachers of a clash of civilisations are wrong."

The President of the European Council, Janez Janša, insisted: "The environment is not only natural but also a sacred place. Community and loyalty between man, nature and the Creator is a basic principle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike. Climate change requires us to rethink how we channel imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship into creating a world, free of dependence on fossil fuels, and yet prosperous and connected as never before. This would not mean that we should get away with what we have achieved. We should only rethink our achievements and look at them from a different point of view."

As 2008 is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the high-level meeting is a welcome opportunity to focus also on the topic of "*Reconciliation through intercultural and inter-faith dialogue*".

EP President Pöttering said "Intercultural dialogue is a key instrument to building bridges between people and to safeguarding peace based on mutual respect. Intercultural dialogue therefore is also an important contribution to the European Union's relations with its neighbouring countries, in particular in the Mediterranean region".

Participants of the meeting shared their views on the two main themes and agreed on the essential role of religions and communities of belief in tackling our common challenges and mobilising our societies for a sustainable future. Participants demonstrated their willingness and commitment to continue this important dialogue, among themselves and with the European institutions.

Commissioners Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Ján Figel' as well as European Parliament Vice President Mario Mauro also took part in the religious leaders' meeting.

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List of participants: see MEMO/08/XX