



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Presidents of Commission, Parliament and European Council bring together religious leaders to discuss democratic rights and liberties

Brussels, 30 May 2011 - Today around twenty senior representatives from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim religions as well as from the Buddhist communities met in Brussels on the invitation of President José Manuel Barroso and co-chaired by Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament and Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council. They discussed effective ways of rights and liberties with a view to build a Partnership for democracy and shared prosperity between Europe and its neighbourhood.

This was the seventh in a series of annual meetings launched by President Barroso in 2005. This is the second time that the meeting takes place in the context of the Lisbon Treaty which foresees in its Art 17 that the Union maintains an "open, transparent and regular dialogue" with religion, churches and communities of conviction. Today's meeting testifies once again of the importance that European institutions give to this dialogue.

José Manuel Barroso, the European Commission President said: "Our task and ambition is to promote democracy, pluralism, the rule of law, human rights and social justice not only in Europe but also in our neighbourhood. I strongly believe these challenges cannot be met without the active contribution of the religious communities. Today's discussion confirmed our common commitment to the promotion of democratic rights and liberties, including freedom of religion and of belief.

Jerzy Buzek, the President of the European Parliament added: "Religious communities are of paramount importance for the social fabric in EU countries. This is also true for the dynamic changes in our neighbourhood. The European Parliament always stressed that the freedom of religion or belief is one of the most fundamental human rights. In order to be fully effective, as part of its neighbourhood policy, the EU needs to cooperate on the ground with religious groups on issues ranging from education and health care to rebuilding post-conflict societies."

Herman Van Rompuy, the President of the European Council said: "Let us not forget history. It is on the march in North Africa and the Arab world. This long march to freedom and justice. Precisely the values that are rooted in the European Treaties. This is not then the time for us Europeans, to become less open, less tolerant, more selfish or materialistic, even more racist. Values can not survive without spiritual, religious or ethical impetus. This is where you can play a major role. Nobody has a monopoly on the great human values which give meaning to our lives and our societies. But without this impetus and without this drive, everything may collapse. We must be conscious of this."

Since the beginning of the year extraordinary events have been unfolding in the Europe's closest neighbourhood that remind us of the waves of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 80s and early 90s. We share common future with our neighbours. Back in April the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy launched an ambitious Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean. The EU is by far the biggest donor and investor in the countries in the neighbourhood, but Europe is above all determined to promote and protect democratic rights and liberties, not only in our continent, but also beyond. Democracy has been the key for peace and prosperity in Europe, the EU is resolved to share these benefits with all partners, particularly with our neighbours.

The discussions took place in a frank and open spirit. The faith leaders from thirteen EU Members States (United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Hungary, France, Belgium, Austria, Italy, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, the Netherlands) and from third countries (Russia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) welcomed the EU's determined and renewed engagement with its nearest neighbours. They expressed their readiness to work side by side with the European institutions to promote democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms which are indispensable in the building of pluralist and democratic societies.

Vice-President of the European Parliament László Tökes, Vice-President of the European Commission Viviane Reding, Commissioner John Dalli, Commissioner Štefan Füle and Commissioner Cecilia Malmström also participated in the meeting.

List of participants: see [MEMO/11/359](#)

["A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity"](#)

More about the [EU dialogue with religion, churches and communities of conviction](#)

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