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PRESS RELEASE

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Commission, Parliament and European Council bring together religious leaders to discuss solidarity between generations and demographic challenges across Europe

Brussels, 12 July 2012 – More than twenty senior representatives from Christian, Muslim and Jewish religions and from the Hindu and Bahá'í communities from all over Europe met today in Brussels, under the motto 'Intergenerational Solidarity: Setting the Parameters for Tomorrow's Society in Europe'. This high-level meeting was called by José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and co-chaired by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, and László Surján, Vice-President of the European Parliament representing President Martin Schulz. In a frank and open spirit, the leaders discussed intergenerational solidarity and other important demographic challenges for Europe, like tackling unemployment, fostering active ageing, and reconciling work and private life. President Barroso encouraged religious leaders to engage in public dialogue and show the specific contributions that churches and religious communities can make to explain the need for solidarity.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, said: "To tackle the economic crisis, we are doing a lot to ensure the right balance between solidarity and responsibility among Member States. But we need to devote at least as much attention to solidarity and responsibility among the young and the old. Ultimately, we will only be able to come well out of this crisis and lay the foundations of a prosperous future, if we keep solidarity between people and generations at the heart of our actions. This is the glue that keeps our communities together. The churches and religious communities are well placed to build bridges in our societies."

Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council said: "We cannot afford, socially, economically and in the first instance, humanely, a 'lost generation' in Europe. Neither can we afford to have older people side-lined for 'lesser productivity'. The productivity of wisdom and knowledge is for sure not as measurable as the productivity of manufacturing consumer goods, but African wisdom reminds us that when an older man dies, a library disappears. Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and their NGO's, schools and associations are bringing, at local level, persons together. They can, also therefore, play an important role in improving understanding and mutual learning between generations"

László Surján, Vice-President of the European Parliament, stated: "Intergenerational solidarity is an obligation in Judeo-Christian heritage and in other religions as well. Nowadays, it is not only a question of religion but intergenerational solidarity has strong

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financial implications too: today's debt can be seen as tomorrow's potential taxes. Debt reduction therefore is a matter of intergenerational justice. Debt is not only a burden for new generations; it is multiplied by an interest rate. Europeans might well be envious of interest-free medieval times, or could well listen to other cultures in which there is no interest to be paid at all. It may be unrealistic to think about an interest-free financial system, but the alarming recent news from the City of London creates a strong desire for something completely new."

During the meeting, participants agreed on the need to raise awareness of the huge societal challenges, to take up responsibilities in important areas like strengthening solidarity between young and old, and fighting discrimination, and to effectively contribute to the Commission's overall growth strategy for Europe, by striving for better education, less poverty, and a fairer society.

Background

The topic of the meeting, 'Intergenerational Solidarity: Setting the Parameters for Tomorrow's Society in Europe', brings into practice some of the aims of the European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, namely to focus on ambitious goals in the areas of employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy. Moreover, the European Union has designated 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Age discrimination is not only a question of fundamental rights, it is also an economic issue, since it prevents capable and skilled people finding work. The European Year offers a framework for triggering new initiatives by a wide range of stakeholders, including religious organisations.

Today's high-level meeting of religious leaders was the eighth one in a series launched by Commission President Barroso in 2005. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) enshrined the open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches, religious communities as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations into primary law (Art 17 TFEU). Beyond regular seminars with the different interlocutors, there is one annual high-level meeting with religious leaders and one with philosophical and non-confessional representatives.

The meeting took place in the European Commission's headquarters in Brussels. Vice-President of the European Commission Maroš Šef•ovi• and Commissioner Connie Hedegaard also participated.

For a list of participants: see [MEMO/12/546](#)

[Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth](#)

[2012 European year for active ageing and solidarity between generations](#)

More on [the European Commission's dialogue with churches, religious communities and philosophical and non-confessional organisations](#)

[Website of José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission](#)