

PHILOSOPHICAL & NON-CONFESSIONAL DIALOGUE

Brussels, 15 October 2010, Berlaymont Building

Combating poverty and social exclusion - an imperative for European governance

President Barroso

President Van Rompuy

Commissioners

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be with you today for this, second, annual meeting between the EU and representatives of Europe's philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

This year's annual gathering is the first to take place since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. The dialogue between the EU institutions and your organisations is now a legal obligation. The European Parliament is keen to play its part in the

dialogue. We welcome it as an opportunity for joint reflection on important areas of EU policy

There are two distinct groupings dealt with by Article 17 of the Treaty. In July we held discussion with the faith groups, today I am please to have an exchange with non-confessional groups.

This year, 2010, is the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. As the year draws to a close, we are acutely aware that there is still a tremendous amount to be done on the issue of poverty in our society.

The current economic crisis is first and foremost a human crisis. Behind all the statistics are real men, women and children who are struggling to make ends meet, to hold onto their job or their home, to provide for their family.

All parts of society must pull together if we are to overcome this difficult period. There are already signs of recovery in many of our Member States,

but we must be attentive to the poorest and most marginal in society that they do not get forgotten as the economy starts to pick up.

Organisations like yours reflect upon the human condition and ask the fundamental questions about our very existence in this world. Whether we come at these big questions from a faith perspective or a non-confessional perspective, there are a set of basic universal values which we all have in common.

As the great French philosopher Jacques Maritain put it when discussing the work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ***"The nations should and could reach practical agreement on basic principles of human rights without achieving a consensus on their foundations."***

The European Union is the best example of a community of nations founded on shared fundamental values, at the core of which is the

inherent dignity in each and every human being. Respect for human dignity obliges us to seek that all persons can live in full dignity. Solidarity is a core European value which is directed towards recognising the dignity of the poor and marginalized. It is the basis of the fair and just society that we would all like to bring about.

Authentic human development can only occur when we foster integral human development - paying attention not only to physical needs, but also to all aspects of the human person, including intellectual, emotional and spiritual.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to meet Europe's philosophical and non-confessional organisations; and I look forward to hearing your views on how we can together fight the scourges of poverty and social exclusion.

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