

SPEAKING POINTS FOR PRESIDENT BUZEK

EU PRESIDENTS MEETING WITH FAITH LEADERS

BERLAYMONT, 30 MAY 2011, 10H00 - 14H00

I am delighted to co-chair this annual meeting on my second occasion.

This exchange between religious leaders and the Presidents of the EU institutions is now in its 7th year and I commend President Barroso for such an important initiative.

It is also the second time that the meeting takes place since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty which provides a legal basis for such dialogue.

As the directly-elected institution, Parliament has always been open and close to the citizens and have hosted many conferences, seminars and exhibitions over the years which allow religions to contribute to European public policy debates.

This afternoon Parliament too, as an institution, will begin its own dialogue. We will start with a public consultation seminar to get input from different faith perspective on how they would like us to structure our dialogue.

This morning's discussion should focus on the recent Commission and High Representative Communication on "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity".

An underlying principle is that our shared European values are in fact universal values. Because all our values boil down to the core belief in inherent human dignity.

It is on this basis that we seek to promote human rights, freedom and democracy beyond our borders. We are not seeking to impose our European way of life in our neighbouring nations; but we must respond to the cry for freedom and dignity that calls from every human heart.

My own experience in the Solidarnosc movement in Poland in the 1980s taught me that human hope cannot be repressed forever. It also taught me that solidarity from free democratic states is vital for keeping this hope alive in the people.

In all of these religious communities can play a major role in defending human dignity. Religious leaders can give leadership in promoting openness, tolerance, respect for minorities and religious freedom.

Religions represent the soul of our societies and are of paramount importance for the social fabric. Communities in the EU have strong links of fellowship with their brothers and sisters on the other side of the Mediterranean. All of these bonds can be used to cooperate for the same goals.

EU neighbourhood policy must include cooperation on the ground with religious groups on issues ranging from education and health to rebuilding post-conflict societies through peace and reconciliation.

Our new EEAS has the potential to be a major force for good in the world, promoting, as stated in the Lisbon Treaty Preamble "the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law."

It is clear that the EU's Foreign Policy needs to develop its understanding of religion, culture and identity if the EU wants to be effective in fostering these values in our near neighbourhood. The EEAS must be endowed with analytical and strategic capacity to deal with religion and we must be committed to working with religious communities.

I look forward to the contributions of the leaders of the different faith traditions on this vital subject of our time.