



Brussels, 30 November 2011

Dear Mrs Wallis,  
Dear Mr Schultz,  
Dear Mr Deva,

On behalf of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics I would like to congratulate you on your candidacy for the Presidency of the European Parliament.

As Europe is going through very turbulent times, the outlines of a political union are becoming ever more pronounced. Common values are the very core, the foundations of such a political union. Shared European values, not only laid down in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, but most of all defined by the people of Europe in an open and ongoing debate.

The Lisbon Treaty introduces in Article 17, the obligation for the EU to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

Well before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, President Barroso of the European Commission initiated annual meetings with church leaders. In the course of the years, those meetings were extended to include representatives of the leadership of the Council and the European Parliament. Meetings with secularist representatives were less frequent and less actively promoted by the EU leaders.

All three leaders have appointed high level civil servants for contacts with churches and non confessional organisations. The European Parliament has charged a Vice President with contacts with religions and non confessional organisations, however, the person in question is publicly rather unfavourably disposed to secularism.

Although we welcome any dialogue with civil society, we note that the dialogue is not representative, not inclusive and not transparent. The implementation of Article 17 has so far been very onesidedly focussing on relations with churches, increasingly deaf to secularist voices, whether atheist, agnostic, humanist, (liberal) religious or other life stance. It means conservative religious groups, and religious groups that have a well organised lobby, are disproportionately influencing European policies, whereas hundreds of millions of Europeans are not heard. The EU institutions have a duty to ensure that all 500 million citizens are equally heard, regardless of their religion or belief, regardless of whether they have chosen to join a community or association of like minded people.

The next President of the European Parliament takes office at a defining moment in European integration. In our view, this is a historic opportunity to build a political union. We would therefore be very interested to hear your proposals as a candidate for the implementation of Article 17 in a representative, inclusive and transparent way, doing justice to the diversity of religion, belief and life stance in Europe.

With kind regards,

Sophie in 't Veld,  
Chair,  
European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics