



Brussels, 30 November 2011

Dear President Buzek,

By way of this letter I want to express my strong disapproval of the way Article 17 of the Treaty, calling for a regular, transparent and open dialogue with churches and non-confessional organisations, is organised in this House.

As the European Union is evolving into a full fledged political union, it becomes ever more important to define our shared European values. Not just as words in a Treaty, but in an open dialogue *between* citizens.

Today I attended the Seminar organised by you on "European Parliament implementation of Article 17 Lisbon Treaty". In your absence, the meeting was chaired by Vice President Tokes, charged by the Bureau with relations with churches and secular organisations.

I have to protest against the way this meeting was organised. I am afraid it does not qualify as an open and transparent dialogue, as required by Art 17 of the Treaty. I am appalled at the lack of respect for, and recognition of secular voices in Europe. The seminar does not reflect European values such as the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and belief.

The panel of speakers was made up of three representatives of different Grand Lodges, and the President of the European Humanist Federation. Though not in any way challenging the qualities of the panellists, the composition of the panel was limited and one sided, and not in any way representative and inclusive.

The criteria for selecting the speakers and other participants remain unclear, despite repeated requests for clarification to your Cabinet.

Many of the participants got their invitation just days before the meeting took place.

I left the meeting, as I do not feel in these conditions a meaningful and sincere exchange could be held.

On December 13th 2010 and on July 12th 2011 I have written to you on behalf of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics, regarding the implementation of Article 17 in the European Parliament in such a way that it reflects the full diversity of life stances in Europe. I have yet to receive an answer to those letters.

I must state my strong disappointment at the way in which secular voices - whether of an atheist, agnostic or indeed religious background - are treated in this House. Indirectly it is an affront to those millions of citizens who are not represented in the Article 17 Dialogue.

I hope you will find the time not only to reply to my earlier letters, but also to all those citizens who are eager to be included in the debate on our shared values. I hope this can be the start of a truly open, transparent, inclusive and representative dialogue in the spirit of the European Treaties.

With kind regards,

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

C.c.
Vice President Laszlo TÖKÉS
Guy VERHOFSTADT, President ALDE Group
Joseph DAUL, President EPP Group
Martin SCHULZ, President S&D Group
Jan ZAHRADIL, President ECR Group
Rebecca HARMS and Daniel COHN-BENDIT, Co-Presidents Greens/EFA Group
Lothar BISKY, President GUE/NGL Group
Nigel FARAGE and Francesco SPERONI, Co-Presidents EFD Group