



Brussels, 6th of January 2012

Subject: Implementation of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty

Honourable Members of the Bureau,

On 10/01/2012 you will be discussing the report by Vice President Tókéš on the implementation of Article 17 by the European Parliament. On behalf of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics I would like to bring to your attention three letters we have sent to you on this subject on earlier occasions. None of these letters received an adequate reply.

First of all, we reiterate our request that the Bureau elaborates proposals for the implementation of Article 17, to be discussed and voted by the Parliament as a whole. We feel it is not a mere administrative matter, but it merits a full and public political debate, allowing European citizens to follow the debate and express their views to their MEPs. We therefore object to any decisions being taken by the Bureau alone, or indeed by the administration.

Secondly, we feel that a Dialogue that is organised exclusively on the basis of organised life stance, by its nature excludes the convictions and beliefs of those millions of European citizens who happen not to be member of an association or community.

Thirdly, for the second half of the mandate, we urge the Bureau to make sure the Vice President in charge of the implementation of Article 17 is someone who has the trust and confidence of all life stances. Public statement by Members of the leadership of this House suggest that they are personally opposed to the separation of church and state, and they do not feel public bodies such as the EU institutions should be secular in nature. They consider Christianity should be a determinant factor in our political work. Such views are a violation of the freedom of religion and belief, and an affront to millions of non-religious Europeans or indeed many Christians who believe public bodies should be neutral, secular in nature. The Bureau must choose a Vice President who is able to represent all views.

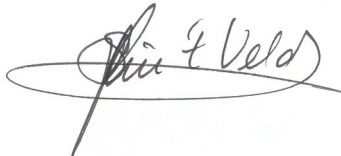
Fourthly, we are firmly opposed to any special, privileged treatment of churches and other (non-confessional) organisations. Any meetings or events on EP premises involving churches or non confessional organisations, should be subject to the same rules as any other external parties such as civil society or business organisations. No special unit must be created for relations with churches and non confessional organisations.

Fifthly, we reiterate our calls for more transparency on the implementation of Article 17. Despite repeated requests it is unclear how the topics are chosen and by whom, and on what basis participants are selected.

Finally, 500 million citizens of Europe hold a very wide range of convictions and beliefs. The way the Article 17 Dialogue is set up must fully reflect this diversity of life stances across Europe. The ways in which citizens live and express their life stance differs just as widely, ranging from very strong, hierarchical, Europe-wide structures, down to loose networks or local communities, down to purely individually held convictions - religious as well as non-religious - without belonging to any kind of organisation. All these life stances must be heard and must be enabled to participate in the Dialogue. That is not an easy challenge, but a Dialogue that does not represent the full range of life stances, has no legitimacy. The Parliament, more than any other body, has the duty to ensure the Dialogue is open, fully representative and transparent.

We hope our remarks will help improve the implementation of Article 17 in the European Parliament.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie in 't Veld', with a large, sweeping underline that extends to the left and right of the name.

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

C.c.
Guy VERHOFSTADT, President ALDE Group
Joseph DAUL, President EPP Group
Martin SCHULZ, President S&D Group
Jan ZHRADIL, President ECR Group
Rebecca HARMS and Daniel COHN-BENDIT, Co-Presidents Greens/EFA Group
Lothar BISKY, President GUE/NGL Group
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