



# European Humanist Federation

international non-profit association under Belgian law

## Fédération Humaniste Européenne

association internationale sans but lucratif de droit belge

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### **HUMANISTS WELCOME INCLUSION IN COUNCIL OF EUROPE “HIGH LEVEL” DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIONS**

The European Humanist Federation (EHF) warmly welcomes the recommendation *[note 1]* by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that the 47 member states set up a “platform for dialogue” between high-level representatives of Europe’s main religions and of humanist and non-religious organisations.

Commenting today, David Pollock, President of the EHF, said: “The EHF is ready to take part in a dialogue. We need to emphasise what all our traditions have in common and explore how best people of all beliefs, religious and non-religious, can live together in democratic societies. Although religion is now of little importance to the self-identity of most people in Europe *[note 2]*, it remains significant for many and retains considerable institutional power that needs to be harnessed for social cohesion and mutual respect. A dialogue under the auspices of the Council of Europe could contribute helpfully to the debate about the place of religion in free, democratic societies that is taking place across Europe.

“The EHF is well placed to contribute to this dialogue. We took part in the deliberations of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education which produced the report agreed on Tuesday *[note 3]*. We have also taken a constructive part in discussions on religious education sponsored by the Council of Europe *[note 4]* and in conferences on intercultural dialogue sponsored by the Council, the EU and the UN Alliance of Civilisations *[note 5]*.”

#### **FURTHER COMMENT:**

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#### **NOTES:**

1. The recommendation, adopted by 95 votes to 4, includes:
  17. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
    - 17.1. promote a genuine partnership for democracy and human rights between the Council of Europe, the religious institutions and humanist and non-religious organisations, seeking to encourage the active involvement of all stakeholders in action to promote the fundamental values of the Organisation;
    - 17.2. establish, to this end, a place for dialogue, a workspace between the Council of Europe and high-level representatives of religions and of non-denominational organisations *[in the French version, “organisations non confessionnelles”]* in order to place existing

relations on a stable and formally recognised platform . . .

- see <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta11/EREC1962.htm>

2. When asked to pick up to three from a list of twelve 'values', people in Europe twice placed religion last: only 7% chose it as important to them personally and only 3% saw it as a value representative of the EU - see Eurobarometer 66: Public Opinion in the European Union (European Commission, September 2007) available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_en.pdf)
3. See report at <http://tinyurl.com/5wcrwfn> and our submission at <http://tinyurl.com/6fsd8pj>
4. See report at <http://tinyurl.com/5wcrwfn>.
5. In May 2010 we took part in a conference on Religious Freedom in Democratic Societies organised by the Spanish presidency with the UN Alliance of Civilisations in Cordoba (see <http://tinyurl.com/644xj3e>), and in November 2010 we took part in the Lisbon Forum sponsored by the Council of Europe and the Alliance of Civilisations on "Freedom of expression, conscience and religion" (our paper is at <http://tinyurl.com/5tayrvb>). We have also published a major paper on "Religion in Society" exploring the meaning of secularism - see <http://tinyurl.com/6e863ev>.