

EUROPESE CONVENTIE

SECRETARIAAT

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BEGELEIDENDE NOTA

van: het secretariaat

aan: de Conventie

Betreft: Bijdrage van de heer Joseph Borrell Fontelles, lid van de Conventie
- "Laten wij God met rust laten"

De secretaris-generaal van de Conventie heeft van de heer Joseph Borrell Fontelles, lid van de Conventie, de bijdrage ontvangen die in bijlage dezes staat.

Let's Leave God Out of This

Josep Borrell Fontelles

It is usually said that Europe is a meeting point of values within a geographical space. However, after the rise of the neo-liberal policies without a social balance, with the imminent enlargement towards the East and the Turkish question on the horizon, it is necessary to specify both the values and the geography of the European project.

In this debate about Europe's being and *raison d'être*, two different but related events have recently had a bearing: the request by the Pope to include a reference to God and to the heritage of the Christian faith in the new European Constitution; and the declarations by the President of the Convention, V. Giscard d'Estaing, affirming that the admission of Turkey would mean the end of the European Union. The combination of these two positions, with a tendency to consider Europe as a "Christian Club" and consequently excluding a great country with a Muslim background like Turkey, is as inevitable as dangerous.

The Pope's demand, adopted by the European Popular Party and by some social-democrat representatives, would mean, in my opinion, an important change in a political project which is inherently secular from the beginning, and must remain being so, with even stronger reasons, in the future.

A Constitution must regulate the relations between civil society and the political power that emanates from the Constitution itself. It is true that the Polish Constitution proclaims God as a source of truth and justice; the Scandinavian countries are officially Lutheran; the British trust that God will save the Queen; and the Americans print on their currency "In God we trust" (something we have not considered necessary for our Euro bills).

Nonetheless, the treaties that have conformed the Union have not included until now any express reference to religious values, nor to any heritage of any origin, maybe because they all comprehended elements that were better forgotten, and because the history of Europe is too full of religious conflicts. On the other hand, the EU is a group of States that have established links among themselves based on totally lay accords and institutions. This was the only way to build a shared future for communities with catholic, orthodox or protestant Christian dominants, among which there are already 10 million Muslims and only a 15% of the population is practising.

It is obvious that the European area has deep Judaeo-Christian roots, and that among the values and cultural guidelines common to the Europeans many come from Christianity. We all celebrate Christmas even if we are really celebrating the day of the winter solstice, the *dies natalis* of the roman emperors, and the way we actually do it is more of a return to the paganism that gave it birth.

Nevertheless, a lot of our values have been forged against the Church or the churches. If we are to celebrate historical heritages we should remember the whole story: with its

religious wars; the massacres of the Crusades; the nights of Saint Bartholomew and the Inquisition's autos-da-fé; Galileo and the forced evangelisations; the pogroms and the turning of a blind eye to fascism.

The truth is that all the values that characterise the European identity are the result of struggles and suffering. They have developed since the Greco-Roman world, the Judaic-Christian contribution, the intense contacts with the Arabic civilization, the ideals of the illustration and the social disputes generated by the industrial revolution. These values are those of freedom, democracy, tolerance, respect for human rights, equality – especially among genders – the separation of the spiritual and temporal power, solidarity, justice and social cohesion, etc. And when it comes to democracy, human rights and equality, God is a recent convert. He was comfortable for centuries with slavery, yesterday He still blessed Franco and He has not been unaware of the Balkan tragedy.

On the other hand, the question of God and the Christian heritage was already debated by the Convention which prepared the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has been proposed by the Convention to be part of the future Constitution with the direct application that was not attained in Nice.

In it are established: freedom of thought and religion; the right to education according to the religious convictions of the parents; respect for religious diversity; and discrimination because of conviction is forbidden.

¿Why then launch the debate again?

Maybe because in some countries – Ireland and Poland for example – political and religious arguments are still being mixed, and the EU is tried to be assimilated with the destruction of their Catholic identity or the imposition of abortion, divorce and euthanasia. Maybe because the Christian democracy – the great post-war political winner- conceived Europe as a symbiosis of Christianity and Roman Law, and this conception - which was easier to maintain during the civil war – is still used as a defence – real or mental – against the increase of cultural diversity and the migratory fluxes that are a consequence of the success of a united Europe.

However, the worst thing would be that the claim to constitutionalising the Christian roots of Europe would be an attempt to distance ourselves from the Muslim world. If, finally, Europe was to say no to Turkey's accession – whatever the real reasons- the whole world, and especially the Muslim world, would see in it the consequences of the conception of Europe as a "Christian Club".

As it is not, we must not expose ourselves to define its limits through the religious dimension, which would be the worst of all possibilities for the role of Europe in the world. Let's then leave God out of this and assume Europe's responsibility in a world with both an excess of religious differences as well as a lack of respect for human rights.