

Dear MEP

Please during the current Strasbourg session add your name to the Declaration *“on freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to education and the prohibition of discrimination in relation to religious symbols”* tabled by Sophie in’t Veld MEP. A copy is given overleaf.

In November the European Court of Human Rights delivered a clearly argued judgement¹ against Italy for its compulsory display of the crucifix in all State school classrooms. The court ruled that this violated the Convention right of parents “to ensure [their children’s education] in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions”. It was clear from the judgement that this ruling was in conformity with Italy’s own constitution, which has been secular since 1985.

Some Italian politicians reacted with fury (the defence minister Ignazio La Russa ranted non-stop on television for four minutes²) and a number of Italian MEPs³ have tabled a Declaration calling for “freedom to display religious symbols representative of a people’s culture and identity on public premises”.

Sophie in’t Veld’s Declaration endorses the Court’s judgement in the name of separation of church and state, stating that “public institutions, at the national and EU level, should represent all citizens, regardless of belief, religion or philosophy, without discrimination”.

Please add your name to this Declaration, thereby upholding the authority of the European Court of Human Rights and the secular nature of the European Union, since secularism (in the sense of official neutrality on questions of religion and belief) is far and away the best guarantor of freedom of conscience.

Yours sincerely

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¹ The judgement is in French at <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?action=html&documentId=857724&portal=hbkm&source=externalbydocnumber&tabl>. An unofficial English translation is available at <http://www.humanistfederation.eu/download/162-ECHR%20judgement%20Lautsi%20v%20Italy.pdf>

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goWDmbvNGr0&feature=fvst>

³ Sergio Silvestris, Mario Mauro, David Maria Sassoli, Gianni Pittella, Magdi Cristiano Allam.

TEXT OF THE DECLARATION

Written Declaration on freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to education and the prohibition of discrimination in relation to religious symbols

Having regard to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to education and the prohibition of discrimination, as protected by articles 9, 2 of Protocol nr 1 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as by articles 10, 14 and 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,

Having regard to the judgment of the European Court on Human Rights *Lautsi v. Italy*

Having regard to the Lisbon Treaty and the future accession of the EU to the ECHR,

The European Parliament,

1. States its attachment to the principle of separation of church and state, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to education and the prohibition of discrimination, as core values of the EU,
2. Considers that public institutions, at the national and EU level, should represent all citizens, regardless of belief, religion or philosophy, without discriminations,
3. Calls Member States to respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and to fully recognise and respect the confessional relevance and nature of religious symbols;
4. Calls on Member States to abide to the European Court of Human rights ruling and ensure that religious symbols are not displayed in premises used by the public authorities.