

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0158/09

pursuant to Rule 115 of the Rules of Procedure

by Antonio Cancian, Mario Mauro, Fiorello Provera, Elisabetta Gardini, Salvatore Iacolino, Crescenzo Rivellini, Sergio Paolo Frances Silvestris, Aldo Patriciello, Paolo Bartolozzi, Cristiana Muscardini, Mara Bizzotto, Barbara Matera, Lara Comi, Antonello Antinoro, Lorenzo Fontana, Roberta Angelilli, Amalia Sartori, Iva Zanicchi, Licia Ronzulli, Giovanni Collino, Marco Scurria, Giancarlo Scotta', Potito Salatto, Pablo Arias Echeverría, Raffaele Baldassarre, Pilar Ayuso, Luis de Grandes Pascual, Pilar del Castillo Vera, Santiago Fisas Ayxela, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Salvador Garriga Polledo, Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines, Esther Herranz García, Carlos José Iturgaiz Angulo, Veronica Lope Fontagné, Antonio López-Istúriz White, Gabriel Mato Adrover, Jaime Mayor Oreja, Pablo Zalba Bidegain, Salvatore Tatarella, Magdi Cristiano Allam, Mirosław Piotrowski and Konrad Szymański
to the Commission

Subject: Display of religious and cultural symbols in public places

On 10 November 2009 Mr Antonio Cancian tabled an Oral Question to the Commission (H-0414/09) and to the Council (H-0413/09) on the recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights approving an application from an Italo-Finnish citizen seeking to remove crucifixes from schools. The question warns against the risk that a broad interpretation of the principle enunciated by the European Court in Strasbourg might call into question the display in public places of religious and cultural symbols.

The Commission gave a somewhat cursory reply in order to avoid taking a stand on the issue. We believe, however, that even while acknowledging the different spheres of responsibility the Community institutions cannot ignore the risk that the present attitude to symbols of the Catholic faith may some day be used against EU emblems. Arsène Heitz, who designed the EU flag (originally as the flag of the Council of Europe), explained that he had drawn his inspiration from the Marian iconography to be found in Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation: 'A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.'¹ What would happen if a citizen applied to the European Court of Human Rights for the EU flag to be removed from public places on the grounds that it was evocative of the Christian tradition?

Tabled: 07.12.2009

Forwarded: 09.12.2009

Deadline for reply: 16.12.2009

¹ Letter from Arsène Heitz to Filippo Caracciolo (Strasbourg, 5 January 1952).