

**Presentation by Keith Porteous Wood  
to José Manuel Barroso  
President of the European Commission  
at the European Commission, Brussels  
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I address directly the challenges that President Barroso has set us in his invitation (below).

I am ashamed that there is any region in the EU where employment discrimination could not be outlawed. Sadly, it is part of my own country, Northern Ireland, which is the only place in the entire EU where it has proved impossible to implement the 2000 Employment Directive.

Few realize that walls up to 8 metres high are still needed to separate Catholic and Protestant areas in order to minimise sectarian violence in city areas. Depressingly, the walls look set to remain; the local residents oppose their removal.

Even worse, it is the younger people in Northern Ireland who are even more determined than their elders to retain the state-funded sectarian schooling that reinforces these divisions. Some pupils leave school without having held a single conversation with someone from the other camp.

Sectarian tensions are not unknown even here in Belgium. I am mindful also of the so-called religious pillars in Belgian and the Dutch society.

We must not forget that while member states are becoming much more diverse, studies alert us that the young in some minority communities are more separatist than their parents. So we must all do a great deal more to reverse social segregation, especially that underpinned by public funds.

We must strive to overcome these sectarian divisions in welfare or health services and, most of all, in education. Whether by design or by practice there is a significant growth in minority faith schools. They increase social segregation, and in particular they tend to isolate those from minority ethnicities and cultures.

However, there is a solution. Studies show that the younger children from all backgrounds start to be educated together, the more successfully they integrate. If they are very young, this draws in the parents too. The more they integrate, the better their chances of employment and consequently the less the chance of social exclusion and poverty.

Let us educate all our children together. This will help reduce ethnic and religious exclusion in the future. It will help ensure a more cohesive Europe at ease with itself in generations to come.