

# CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES

## Rocco Buttiglione, PhD

### Born:

June 6, 1948  
Gallipoli, province of Lecce, Italy

### Family:

Married with four daughters

### Education:

Massimo D'Azeglio high school,  
Turin

Studied law in Turin and Rome

### Professional Positions:

- Professor of Political Science, St. Pius V University
- President, Italian Union of Christian Democrats (CDU-Cristiani Democratici Uniti)<sup>1</sup>
- 1994-2004, Member, Chamber of Deputies, Italian Parliament
- 1994-1995, Secretary, Partito Popolare Italiano<sup>2</sup>
- 1995, Appointed member of Parliamentary Commission for Constitutional Reforms
- 1999-2004, Member, European Parliament
- May 2001-present, Appointed Minister of European Union Policies in second government headed by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi

## ROCCO BUTTIGLIONE, PhD

In August 2004, Dr. Rocco Buttiglione was proposed as Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner-designate for Freedom, Security and Justice by the President of the European Commission, Portugal's José Manuel Barroso. Many expressed surprise and concern at the choice.

Buttiglione, a conservative Catholic who has been described as one of "Pope John Paul II's closest friends and counselors" and "the intellectual alter ego of Pope John Paul II," has a long track record of supporting very conservative positions on HIV/AIDS, women's rights, immigrants' rights, homosexual rights and reproductive rights.

Following the hearing to assess Dr. Buttiglione's suitability for the position, the political coordinators of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs voted to oppose his nomination for both the proposed remit and any other position. After a separate hearing in front of members of the Committee on Legal Affairs, that committee supported his nomination, despite reservations expressed by members of the socialist and green groupings. However, the 25 members of the Commission (one from each member state) are approved or rejected as a bloc, not individually, and Mr. Barroso has expressed his full trust in all of his Commissioner-designates.

**The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs' vote to oppose Dr. Buttiglione's nomination is the first time that a parliamentary committee rejected a nominee to the Commission.**

At an October 13 meeting of the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents (the leaders of the various political groupings within the European Parliament), they decided to submit all of the letters of evaluation drawn up by the individual committees to Mr. Barroso with no additional comments or recommendations.

**On October 21, 2004, the Conference of Presidents plan to meet with Mr. Barroso to discuss all proposed appointments.**

**On October 26, a debate will be held in Strasbourg on the make up of the new Commission.**

**A vote to approve or oppose is expected the next day.**

### Professional History:

Taught at several European universities:

- Lugano
- Teramo
- The International Academy of Philosophy, Liechtenstein, served as pro-rector
- The Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, received honorary degree in Philosophy in May 1994
- The John Paul II Institute for the Family, Rome

Has lectured widely in Latin America and the United States

### Communione e Liberazione

Buttiglione is a senior member of the ultra-conservative Catholic sect Communion and Liberation, led by Fr. Don Giussani. It was founded in the early 1970s as a conservative reaction to student unrest in Italy in 1968.

Members have been called “Stalinists of God,” the “Pope’s Rambos” and “Wojtyla’s Monks” because of their “fervent devotion to papal authority,” and the group has gained tremendous influence under John Paul II.

“Many of their main characteristics reflect those of Mao’s Red Guards - the fanaticism, the blind obedience, the sloganeering, the personality cult around the Pope, manipulation of the media, anti-intellectualism, denunciations, the formulation of rigid ideology, a younger generation mobilized in the struggle against their elders.”<sup>5</sup>

### Conservative Catholic Roots

In September 2002, he was the Italian government’s representative at the opening of a conference by the ultra-conservative Roman Catholic Opus Dei,<sup>3</sup> a shadowy right-wing pressure group with a deeply conservative philosophy and high-level connections in the Vatican and in governments around the world. But Dr. Buttiglione’s true home in the conservative Catholic movement is *Communione e Liberazione* (Communion and Liberation), which believes that freedom is only achieved through Christian faith (see box). He has served on the editorial board of its journal, *Communio*. He was closely involved in the decision to close down its weekly newspaper, *Il Sabato*, after the paper threatened to elevate a confrontation with the Vatican over political alliances.<sup>4</sup>

He is also a patron of the antichoice World Youth Alliance.

### Positions of Rocco Buttiglione, PhD

Dr. Buttiglione has a history of making discriminatory remarks about homosexuals, women, immigrants and others. During his assessment hearings in October 2004, Dr. Buttiglione enraged many members of the European Parliament by describing homosexuality as a sin and suggesting that the role of a woman was to have children and be protected by her husband.

### Reproductive Rights

Dr. Buttiglione fully supports papal pronouncements on reproductive rights. In 2001, in his first week as European Affairs minister, he called for a ban on artificial insemination and started a campaign to outlaw abortion in Italy. As part of this, he proposed a 500 euro grant to every woman who agreed to drop plans for an abortion and to ask for therapy for women and their families considering abortion. He also sought to reduce women’s control over their own bodies by seeking to increase the involvement of men in the abortion decision.<sup>6</sup>

### Women’s Rights

Dr. Buttiglione holds what he describes as well known, traditional views about women and marriage. At his EP hearing, he said, “The family exists in order to allow women to have children and to have the protection of a male who takes care of them. This is the traditional vision of marriage that I defend.”<sup>7</sup>

He has attributed the low birth rate in Europe to women concentrating too much on their careers and not enough on having babies.

### Homosexuality

During his EP hearing, Dr. Buttiglione described homosexuality as a “sin.”

Attacking the 2001 Gay Pride march in Milan, he said, “All are free to call me a bigot and intolerant, but I very freely define homosexual behavior as an indicator of moral disorder.”

Dr. Buttiglione opposes granting same-sex couples benefits similar to those heterosexuals receive.<sup>8</sup>

## Positions of Rocco Buttiglione, PhD (cont.)

### Discrimination

At the Convention that worked on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, he submitted an amendment calling for exclusion of sexual orientation as a ground for discrimination—thereby permitting the conditions to exist for discrimination against gay people.<sup>9</sup>

### Immigration

Dr. Buttiglione supports camps for asylum seekers and quotas for immigration into Europe. He has said that the “level of criminality” of each national group should be taken into account when fixing those quotas. He thinks that certain groups have a high level of criminality and others, “those who are Catholic and Christian,” have a very low level.<sup>10</sup>

### HIV/AIDS

In 1989, at a conference on HIV/AIDS at the Vatican, he said that AIDS is “divine punishment for homosexuality and drug use.”<sup>11</sup>

### Church and State

Like the pope, Buttiglione supported the inclusion of the word “God” in the draft European Constitution, but acknowledged that there was widespread opposition to this move. He suggested two alternatives that might be acceptable to conservatives (both of which were also pushed by the pope and Vatican spokesmen at the time): either recognizing the role of religion in the creation of European societies or making reference to Europe’s Greek and Judeo-Christian roots.<sup>12</sup>

When a Muslim community leader in Italy won a court battle to remove the crucifix from a state school where his children were pupils, Buttiglione said: “It’s ridiculous. In my opinion, the cross should stay and, in any case, whether it stays or goes, it’s not up to a crazy Muslim activist to forbid it. It’s our business, not his.”<sup>13</sup>

## Others on Rocco Buttiglione, PhD

*Upon his appointment to the government in 2001:*

“[Rocco] has started a religious war after only three days [in office]... Who would have guessed that the European affairs ministry could be the ministry of God?”

--Agence France Presse, June 15, 2001.<sup>14</sup>

“I would not want, as a Spanish citizen, to have a minister of justice who thinks that homosexuality is a sin and that a woman should stay at home to have children under the protection of her husband.... These are shocking attitudes—that is the least that one can say.”

--Josep Borell, president of the European Parliament, October 7, 2004.<sup>15</sup>

“He is not the commissioner for Italy. He is the commissioner for the Vatican. It would not bother anyone if this was just in a personal, spiritual way. But he is deeply convinced of a fundamentalist concept of the Catholic religion, by which the state should abide by the Pope’s rule. He is a smart, intelligent person whose political skills are often underestimated. He has already been at the forefront of [the campaign to include a reference to] Catholic roots in the [EU] constitution and in blocking stem-cell research. That is why he is effective and dangerous with his Catholic fundamentalist vision of Europe.”

--Marco Cappato, MEP for the Italian Radical party, September 4, 2004.<sup>16</sup>

*Members of Parliament speak out against Rocco Buttiglione’s nomination to the Commission:*

Members Hannes Swoboda and Martine Roure, on behalf of the Socialist grouping, stated after his hearing at the European Parliament that they had “serious doubt” about Mr. Buttiglione’s proposals on asylum and his statements about family life and homosexuality. “He sees women’s role only in the context of marriage and motherhood.”<sup>17</sup>

--Le Monde, October 12, 2004.

The Dutch Green MEP Kathalijne Buitenweg said that if Mr. Barosso did not withdraw the nomination, the Greens may vote against the whole European Commission.<sup>18</sup>

--Le Monde, October 12, 2004.

Bernard Poignant, president of the French socialists at the EP, said, “When I listened to him I told myself that John Paul II had succeeded sending a Commissioner to Brussels!”<sup>19</sup>

--Le Monde, October 12, 2004.

According to Swedish Prime Minister Goeran Persson, Buttiglione was “sensationally lacking in judgment” for his comments about women and homosexuals.<sup>20</sup>

--AFX, October 13, 2004.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Italian Union of Christian Democrats (Cristiani Democratici Uniti — CDU) is a conservative party which is a junior member of Silvio Berlusconi's coalition government.
- <sup>2</sup> The Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI — Italian Popular Party) emerged from the break-up of the formerly powerful Italian Christian Democratic Party in 1994. After a failed attempt by Dr. Buttiglione to align the PPI with a center-right cartel (the party joined a center-left coalition), he and his followers left the PPI and formed the Cristiani Democratici Uniti (CDU — United Christian Democrats).
- <sup>3</sup> Agence France Presse, "Italian politicians attend opening of Opus Dei conference," January 8, 2002.
- <sup>4</sup> Gordon Urquhart, *The Pope's Armada: Unlocking the Secrets of Mysterious and Powerful New Sects in the Church*, Prometheus Books, 1999.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Agence France Presse, "Berlusconi's Catholic Minister stuns allies with religious crusade," June 15, 2001.
- <sup>7</sup> BBC News Online, "EU panel opposes justice nominee," October 11, 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> Agence France Presse, June 15, 2001.
- <sup>8</sup> Gareth Harding, "EU Chiefs prepare for grilling," United Press International, September 24, 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> David Gow, "MEPs reject anti-gay commission candidate," *The Guardian* (UK), October 12, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas Ferenczi, "With Rocco Buttiglione, a person close to the Vatican enters the commission," *Le Monde*, October 5, 2004.
- <sup>11</sup> William D. Montalbano, "AIDS conference hears papal appeal for unity," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1989.
- <sup>12</sup> Zenit, "Official outlines 3 ways to get religion into a European Constitution," September 9, 2002.
- <sup>13</sup> Tamsin Smith, "Italian Muslims fear 'crucifix fallout,'" BBC News Online, October 28, 2003.
- <sup>14</sup> Agence France Presse, "Berlusconi's Catholic minister stuns allies with religious crusade," June 15, 2001.
- <sup>15</sup> Josep Borell, president of the European Parliament, speaking on Radio Europe I, October 7, 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> Marco Cappato, MEP for the Italian Radical party, quoted in David Cronin, "Rocco Buttiglione: The Pope's pal in Brussels," *European Voice*, September 4, 2004.
- <sup>17</sup> *Le Monde*, October 12, 2004.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> AFX, "Sweden's Persson criticises incoming EU official over comments on women, gays," October 13, 2004.

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*Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) is a non-governmental organization with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. CFFC is accredited as an NGO with the European Parliament. CFFC is part of the Catholic international church reform movement, International Movement—We Are Church, and the European network, Church on the Move. CFFC shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education and advocacy, CFFC works in the United States and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis and Catholic social thinking and teaching.*