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**Press Release**

**Barroso backs down on team at 11th hour**

***"Catholic Church urged Scots MEPs to reject the move"***

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The Herald

MEPs won a historic victory over bureaucrats yesterday when Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, was forced to withdraw his planned team rather than face the humiliation of having it voted down.

Mr Barroso withdrew the executive moments before the scheduled confirmation vote in the European Parliament.

He asked the 732 MEPs for more time to bring his commission more in line with demands from members who vigorously oppose Rocco Buttiglione, the proposed justice commissioner who called homosexuality a sin and holds conservative views on women and marriage.

David Martin, Scottish Labour MEP and former vice president of the parliament, said: "This was a highly significant day which was good for European democracy and showed we are a real parliament." Last night the Catholic Church in Scotland last night condemned the action, claiming it showed prejudice against those with religious beliefs. John Deighan, the Church's parliamentary officer, had e-mailed every Scottish MEP, urging them to reject the move to block Mr Buttiglione, calling it an unjust attack on freedom of religion and conscience. MEPs are opposed to Mr Buttiglione, who has called homosexuality a sin and holds conservative views on women and marriage.

Yesterday, Jose Manuel Barroso, the incoming European Commission president, withdrew his proposed EU executive team to avoid an unprecedented European Parliament defeat and promised to revamp his 24-member executive.

Mr Deighan said: "We are talking of someone who thinks the family is important in society and that sex belongs in marriage." Alyn Smith, the SNP member elected earlier this year, said he would have voted against Mr

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Buttiglione as part of wider exasperation over the whole "take it or leave it" system of voting in commissioners, but he said he had been happy to receive the e-mail from Mr Deighan since all participation in the democratic process was welcomed. He added: "If they expected the European parliament to just rubber stamp their stitch-up they've got it badly wrong. Barroso must now move quickly to put forward a commission in which we can have confidence." Labour's David Martin, Scotland's longest serving MEP, challenged Mr Deighan's interpretation that "those who accept the moral teaching of the Catholic Church are not welcome in positions of authority in the EU". He said it was a question of who was most appropriate for which job. He had argued against the wife of a leading Danish farmer being made agriculture commissioner, or a senior Dutch businesswoman with a seat on many boards being made competition commissioner.

Given Mr Buttiglione's views on the sanctity of marriage and his insistence that homosexuality was a sin, Mr Martin could not see no way Mr Buttiglione being responsible for equality.

A humiliating rejection of Mr Barroso's slate by MEPs was just an hour away when he changed tack and stopped insisting that he was going to keep Mr Buttiglione as justice and home affairs commissioner. MEPs cheered as they witnessed a rare commission retreat. Some booed, signalling anger at Mr Barroso's refusal until the last minute to heed their warnings. While the mess is sorted out, the old commission team will stay on beyond October 31.

Neil Kinnock, vice president of the commission, due to start a new job running the British Council, said: "I see no smiling faces at the prospect of another month at the commission." Mr Buttiglione will probably be moved to a portfolio more acceptable to MEPs .

Michael Cashman, the Labour MEP instrumental in the Italian's downfall by asking him blunt questions about his personal views, said: "I'm glad that, at the 11th hour, Barroso has finally seen sense." A group of Tory MPs last night sent a message to Mr Buttiglione saying they deplored the "vilification" he had suffered. Leader comment Page 17 the e-mail Text of e-mail from John Deighan, Catholic church parliamentary officer: I have been greatly perturbed at the treatment of Rocco Buttiglione because of his moral convictions. The Catholic Church has been greatly supportive of the European Union and the values it has espoused on religious freedom and freedom of conscience. It now seems that those who accept the moral teaching of the Catholic Church are not welcome in positions of authority in the EU. As far as I have been able to ascertain, Mr Buttiglione has expressed no spiteful or bigoted opinions, but

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**ALYN SMITH MEP**

**FIGHTING FOR AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND IN EUROPE**

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rather just that he holds moral views in line with his faith. I urge you to consider acting against this unjust treatment and protect the freedom of religion and conscience of all people.

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