

act4europe

A CAMPAIGN OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY
CONTACT GROUP

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1. EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

This month's EU political headlines surely remain the ratification outcomes and the financial perspectives for 2007 –2013, both issues discussed with rather less than more results during the June Council, which strengthened the general perception of an "EU crisis".

The European Council did not respond to the message sent by the Civil Society Contact Group as well as other civil society organizations, i.e. to show *leadership* and *vision*. Both failures of the European system were somehow absent from the European Council discussions on 18 June. Yet by launching a "period of reflection" on the ratification of the Constitution (ironically recalling the Laeken conclusions), the European Council invited us to actively mobilize around this debate. It is our role to grasp this opportunity, be pro-active and develop our own approach and cycle. We have to admit that we do not have all the answers: NGOs have faced particular challenges in the last years to actively involve their constituencies in the debate, and we must redouble our efforts to engage national, regional, local NGOs throughout the EU rather than proposing ready-made answers.

Regarding the contribution of Act4Europe, part of this process will be the launch of a wide reflection cycle on the participation of NGOs in the European project, building upon the acquis of the last decades but focusing most particularly on the debate over the Constitution.

We will tell you more about it in our next issue, but are already looking forward to sharing views with you on this crucial debate!

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2. Which future for the Constitutional Treaty?

Reconnecting with citizens – Civil Society Contact Groups calls on the European Council to show leadership and vision

In the wake of the recent national referendums rejecting the European Constitutional Treaty, the Civil Society Contact Group has urged the European Council to take immediate action in revitalising Europe for its citizens. In its letter of 13 June to the Council, the Civil Society Contact Group underlined its willingness **to cooperate with the Council** in meeting the challenge of **renewing European citizens' confidence in the European Union project**.

"It is obvious that the EU cannot develop further if there is insufficient understanding and support from its citizens. Better communication, in particular by Member States, about the role and potential of the EU is important, but this is not sufficient. The

European Council needs to show that our policy makers have understood the message”, explained John Hontelez, chair of the Civil Society Contact Group. He continued, “We call upon the European Council to act on two counts: to show vision in leading in a way that motivates and mobilises the women, men and youth of Europe and reconnects them to a common future. Secondly, open up. Launch a project of transparency, democratisation and accountability of the EU”.

Yet both elements were absent from the Conclusions of the June European Council, overall dominated by the Franco-British struggle and national interests. You can find the Council Conclusions on:

<http://www.eu2005.lu/en/actualites/conseil/2005/06/17conseur-concl/conseil.pdf>

Ratification delayed: June European Council Summit calls for a period of reflection on the Constitutional Treaty

EU leaders as expected agreed during the June Council meeting on a **"period of reflection"** on the constitution. This to prevent a domino effect of the document's rejection in countries still planning to have referendums, as it happened in France and the Netherlands. Member State governments are to come together next year, under the Austrian EU presidency, to evaluate the situation.

However, EU leaders stressed that the constitution's text will not be questioned or renegotiated and that ratification will continue. The process will not likely to be ended before **mid-2007**, according to Mr Juncker. This means the previously fixed **deadline of end of October 2006 will no longer be valid.**

EU Council [conclusions](#) on the Constitutional Treaty, 16 and 17 June 2005 (Declaration by the heads of State or Government of the Member States of the European Union):

<http://www.eu2005.lu/en/actualites/conseil/2005/06/17conseur-decl/index.html>

Polish president calls for a “pan-European” referendum

Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski has expressed his idea of a pan-European referendum where “our citizens have the chance to express their plans and dreams for Europe” in Germany's biggest selling *Bild Zeitung* on Saturday 25 June. In the comment piece, the Polish president calls for more "European thinking" and urges a continuation of enlargement - with concerns rising that the EU's expansion policy will be the first casualty of Europe's crisis. After the rejection of the Treaty in France and the Netherlands and the suspension of the referendum in the UK, Kwasniewski declared his country will put off referendum plans too, referring the decision to the June's Summit outcome. Kwasniewski, reacting to the failed Council's Summit wrote: "It is clear to us that the European project needs a certain revision process, change and dynamic in order to be attractive and competitive", "The bitter experience of the last weeks shows that Europe needs mobilisation and not protest."

Three countries ratify the text after the Nos: is the Constitution still alive?

Luxembourg

Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker won't have to resign, as Luxembourg citizens on 10 July voted Yes to the EU Constitution by approving the

Treaty by 56.5%. The result seems to keep the Constitutional Treaty on the agenda, against general expectation after the No votes in France and The Netherlands. Commission President José Manuel Barroso welcomed the outcome and said he wished to rapidly set up a plan 'D' for dialogue, debate and democracy leaning against Wallstroem's idea of a "Plan D" for democracy. Luxembourg's parliament has ratified the Treaty on 28 June. 55 MP's voted in favour with 5 abstentions, all coming from the populist ADR party.

Malta

The Maltese parliament ratified the European constitution on Wednesday (6 July), becoming the 12th EU country to endorse the charter and the first national parliament to pass the document unanimously. The vote from the Mediterranean island nation came after the opposition Labour Party decided to vote in favour of the constitution. "This new chapter offers many opportunities for the Maltese people and both sides were going forward together," Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi said, adding that "through its vote, Parliament is closing a long, controversial, divisive, chapter in its history and opening another where there is national support on European policy."

Cyprus

The parliamentary vote of 30 June was preceded by a two -day debate. The vote in the 56-seat legislature was 30 in favour and 19 against, with one abstention. The opposing votes came from the left-wing AKEL party. Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs George Iacovou said this was "a very big day for Cyprus and a very important day for Europe," and expressed the satisfaction of the government of the Republic over the ratifying of the European Constitutional Treaty by the House of Representatives.

Out of the poll analysis: why did the French and Dutch vote no?

Contrary to common belief, enlargement was not one of the main reasons why French and Dutch voters rejected the Treaty, according to a recent Eurobarometer study: six percent of Dutch voters say that enlargement was the reason for their no vote and only three percent say specifically that further expansion to include Turkey was the reason.

Meanwhile, in France, the percentages were reversed with 3 percent against further enlargement and 6 percent against Turkish membership of the EU. Referring to the Dutch and French vote, European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso said last week that the signal sent by the electorate regarding Turkey needs to be taken seriously. Poland's president Alexander Kwasniewski previously already expressed his concern about the impact of the Treaty's rejection on the EU's enlargement policy.

Instead of worrying about further enlargement consequences, Dutch voters' main reason for voting no was **the lack of information** (32%) followed by a fear of a loss of national sovereignty (19%) and opposition to the government (14%). Asked about the consequences of their vote, two thirds of Dutch citizens (66%) thought that the "no" victory would allow for a renegotiation of the constitution in order to better defend the interests of the Netherlands.

In France, the main reason given for rejecting the treaty was the fear that it would have a **negative effect on employment** (31%), the second reason was that people felt that the economic situation in France was bad (26%) followed by the belief that the constitution was economically too liberal. Over six out of ten French people

(62%) thought that the no vote would mean the constitution would be **renegotiated to be more social**.

You can find more information on:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/flash/fl172_en.pdf

3. Other news

UK presidency's calendar

Taking the turn from the Luxembourg Presidency, the UK Presidency's calendar is available online, with the Council's, the Parliament's and Commission's meeting dates for the period from 1 July to 31 December.

http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/fr/fc/85471.pdf (French version)

Long awaited Commission's Action plan on communication to be published soon

Margot Wallström, Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication has been facing critics for failing to react quickly to the communication gap between EU political elites and citizens after the two negative referenda (France and the Netherlands) on the EU Constitution. Conscious of the urgency to 'reconnect' with EU citizens, Commissioner Wallström hopes to present the action plan on communication on 20 July. A white paper on communication strategy, involving other institutions and stakeholders, is due to be issued before the end of 2005. Act4europe obviously will keep you up to date on evolutions regarding the issue.

Commissioner [Wallström's website](#):

http://europa.eu.int/comm/commission_barroso/wallstrom/index_en.htm

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/press_communication/index_en.htm

Direct dialogue between the Commission and with citizens? Margot Wallström's web blog

'Communicating Europe' has become one of the buzz words to remedy the current political crisis. Rhetoric or reality? Communication or real participation? In any case the [weblog](#) set up by Margot Wallström is an innovative way of linking directly to the citizens. There you will find more about her work as Commissioner, her personal opinion about current issues and policies and other topics across all sectors, but also get a feeling of current debates, initiatives and be given an opportunity to react directly.

<http://weblog.jrc.cec.eu.int/page/wallstrom>

4. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP and Act4Europe

Civil Society Contact Group discusses future priorities

The **EU Civil Society Contact Group** brings together six of the largest European NGO platforms: Social Platform, Concord (European NGO confederation for relief and development), Human Rights and Democracy Network, Green 10 (environmental organisations), European Women's Lobby, EFAH (European Forum for the Arts and Heritage), which decided to come together to provide common input in the Debate on the Future of Europe. Facing a necessary re-organisation of priorities, the Group came together on July 5th to discuss its past achievements, vision and future objectives.

A main pillar of the group's work remains the information exchange and the connection of different networks. As a priority for common work during the coming years the key work area will be participatory democracy and issues directly linked to its development. Another important point of discussion was the CSCG's external and internal communication with the resolution of enhancing knowledge and ownership of the CSCG within its members' networks. As it is for civil dialogue, primary tasks will be to better reach out to national members, building on a nurturing relationship for both sides and to reactivate the act4europe network for a bottom up debate on the future of Europe.

Access passes: the European Parliament (partly) reopens doors to citizens

Elodie Fazi, coordinator of the Civil Society Contact Group met on 30 June with **Mr James Nicholson**, member of the College of Quaestors in charge of the visitors passes of the European Parliament.

The meeting, part of Act4europe's call for action **against the new internal accreditation rules**, focused on discussing the state of play and solutions to ease organisation's renewal of permanent access passes to the Parliament. Mr Nicholson explained that the new rules had been decided by the Security Unit and not by the College of Quaestors who reacted by asking the Security's Unit's to **remove the location rule**: European and national organisations will be guaranteed their accreditation without needing to have a seat in one of the institutional cities.

The **number of passes instead will definitely be reduced**. The old system of 6 passes per organisation cannot be kept as the EP increasingly experienced security problems throughout the last years. The College evaluates instead the possibility of keeping the number of **4 nominative passes** per organizations and to set up a database, allowing daily passes to citizens who use the EP on a more sporadic basis. For those visitors a special entry would be created where they could enter the European Parliament without the help of an MEP, but simply by showing their ID-card. Act4europe's suggestion to emit 4 non-nominatives passes per organisation; usable by several members of the staff has been taken on positively by Mr Nicholson who offered to discuss the idea at the next Quaestors meeting.

Still it was thanks to the relay of some national NGOs particularly in the UK and the support of MEPs that the CSCG call gained enough weight to be considered by the Quaestors. Act4Europe therefore, encouraged by Mr Nicholson and with the support of the CSCG, will continue to follow up the issue and look for further suggestions.

Financial perspectives: European Parliament calls for more resources devoted to participatory democracy

The European Parliament's report on Policy Challenges and Budgetary Means of the Enlarged Union was adopted during the Strasbourg plenary session on June 8,

sending a clear signal that the development of democracy needs adequate and sustainable resources. As proposed by the Civil Society Contact Group, the report indeed *"calls for increased coherence between the financial perspectives and the new provisions of the Constitution, also with regard to participatory democracy and, in particular, to the development of civil dialogue and the implementation of citizens' initiatives"*, preparing further implementation of this essential principle in future debates on budget and finance.

Yet this strong political sign was weakened by the failure of the European Council on 16 and 17 June, which turned out to be a battle between different visions of Europe.

The report, as adopted, can be found on:

[http://www.europarl.eu.int/comparl/tempcom/finp/report/p6_taprov\(2005\)0224_en.doc](http://www.europarl.eu.int/comparl/tempcom/finp/report/p6_taprov(2005)0224_en.doc)

5. MEMBER'S INITIATIVES

NGOs hand over the "key to democracy" to Commissioner Wallström

Solidar (member of the CONCORD development network) and The European Women Lobby followed the New Europe's SOS Europe –wake up call to hand over the **"key to democracy"** to Commissioner **Margot Wallstroem** on June 29, together with MEP Jo Leinen and other supporters of the action. Some weeks before The Commissioner delivered a rather strong critic on the EU's "democracy deficit". The Convention was supposed to tackle this deficit, but "democracy takes time", she noted. Her scope, she told, would be to send a **"clear signal to citizens that we have learnt"**, that the EU will be more open and democratic. Wallstroem simultaneously proposed to launch a **"plan Democracy (plan D)"**, aiming at more participation and involvement of citizens in EU politics. Relating to her statement, New Europe organised as a response the handing over of the key of democracy, underlining the weight and outreach of her message.

The delegation refers with the action to the wish for a "fully fledged 'democratic infrastructure' as the citizens key to Europe: " The EU funds the building of roads, bridges and similar infrastructure. Time has come to fund a 'democratic infrastructure' that strengthens the participation of citizens and helps improving the work of European organisations, movements and European political parties". The action wants to remind EU politicians that through an active participation of citizens in the decision making of the European Union Europe can become a true participatory democracy.

Concord holds bi-annual meeting with Commissioner Louis Michel

A Concord delegation led by President Frans Polman, including Giampiero Alhadeff, Solidar's Secretary General, Justin Kilcullen from Trocaire and 10 others met with **Commissioner Louis Michel** on June 30. The NGOs discussed three main issues: **Development Education, Policy Coherence and Civil Dialogue**. During the meeting also the Global Call for Action against Poverty Campaign came to discussion, an independent campaign ensuring that world leaders tackle the causes of poverty by delivering trade justice, more and better aid and full debt cancellation and the EC's development education programme.

<http://www.solidar.org/DocList.asp?SectionID=1>