

BULLETIN 42

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1. EDITORIAL

Dear Act4europe friends,

The agenda for the next two months will be particularly heavy and in this edition we will be focussing on two main issues of crucial importance for NGOs to get engaged in EU debate: the transparency initiative and the June European Council that will be taking a decision on the future of the Constitutional Treaty.

The Green paper on transparency initiative has just been published and a consultation was launched, which will last until the end of August 2006. On this occasion the CSCG and ALTER-EU would like to inform you about the results of their joint brainstorming meeting on transparency initiative.

The June Summit will be one of the this month's highlights and in this edition you can find details about EU institutions' positions as well as Members States officials' declarations on the future of the Constitutional Treaty and especially on improving the involvement of European citizens in this debate.

What does "participatory democracy" really mean in the EU and how to link "Brussels" to the grassroots? These questions will be at the heart of the conference organised by the CSCG in July 2006. During this conference, the Civil Society Contact Group will publicly present its study, **"Civil dialogue, making it work better"** that will be published mid July.

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2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP and ACT4EUROPE

Transparency initiative: CSCG meets with ALTER EU and publishes information briefing

The debate on the transparency initiative is heating up... On 23 May, the Civil Society Contact Group and ALTER-EU (The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation) organized a joint brainstorming meeting, which was an opportunity to exchange views and discuss possible common positions. Participants stressed in particular that a strong approach should be taken to lobbying transparency, including strong incentives and disincentives to register in an online database and provide far-reaching information about an organisation's funding, membership and mandate. More information on the transparency initiative can be found on a briefing published by the CSCG on 17 May: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/Transparency%20Initiative%20briefing%20final%201.pdf>

CSCG contribution to the Transparency Initiative debate (January 2006): http://act4europe.horus.be/code/EN/actions.asp?id_events=107

ALTER EU website: <http://www.alter-eu.org/>

CSCG sends message to the June Council

One year after the French and Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty, the June European Council to take place on 15-16 June will be an important test for EU leaders to demonstrate their commitment to taking citizens on board and including their concerns on the European agenda. A failure to do so might not only undermine the EU's decision-making capacity in the short term, but also significantly damage citizens' trust in the European project and compromise any agreement as to the text's future in the years to come.

In its resolution the Civil Society Contact Group sent on 24 May, the CSCG called on Heads of State and Government to:

- Open up the discussion to make it "matter" for citizens as much as for their political leaders
- Build upon the achievements of the Constitutional Treaty
- Achieve real "citizens' agenda"

You can find the CSCG message for the June summit here:

<http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/Message%20to%20June%20Summit%2020066.pdf>

CSCG to present study "Civil dialogue, making it work better" at 12 July conference

Did NGOs fail to take citizens on board of the European project? Should they be part of the dialogue with EU institutions or of the contestation? What does "participatory democracy" really mean in the EU and how to link "Brussels" to the grassroots? These questions have been high on the agenda over the last years and will increasingly be in the coming weeks, as the debate over the European Commission's Communication White Paper and the Transparency Initiative heats up.

The Civil Society Contact Group would like to invite you to the conference **NGOs and the EU: Making civil dialogue work better** that will take place on 12 July from 9.30 to 17.00 and will provide space for common discussion over some of these key challenges (Venue: Scotland House, Rond Point Schuman 6). On this occasion, we will present the study *"Civil Dialogue: making it work better"*, which assesses dialogue and consultations between NGOs and EU institutions in seven different policy areas, at EU and national level (for more information on the study, please consult: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/CD%20study%20-%20presentation.pdf>).

The aim of the conference is to bring together EU and national level NGO activists, giving them the opportunity to discuss the study's main outcomes and recommendations, based on their daily experience and difficulties. It will thus put a particular focus on participation through interactive workshops focusing on key aspects of the study:

- improving the way EU institutions consult
- transparency and representativity
- linking "Brussels" to the grassroots

Interpretation will be provided in English and French. To register, please send an e mail to Raluca Petrescu: assistant@act4europe.org.

More information will soon be posted on:

http://act4europe.horus.be/code/EN/actions.asp?id_events=110.

3. NEWS

Making Brussels more transparent! European Commission publishes the Green Paper on Transparency

Who gets Community funding? What influence do lobbies have? What rules of conduct do those in charge of the European institutions have to follow? These crucial questions will be again in the spotlight during the consultation period launched by the Green Paper on Transparency initiative that was published on 3 May 2006. The Green Paper focuses on three components of the European Transparency Initiative that will be driven forward on the basis of the results of a public consultation:

- Creation of a more structured framework for the activities of interest representatives
- Revision of the minimum standards of consultation
- Mandatory disclosure of information about the beneficiaries of EU funds under shared management

If you want to take part in the consultation, you should know that contributions to the three different chapters of the consultation (Interest Representation, Minimum Standards, Disclosure of beneficiaries of EU funds) will be treated separately: it is thus necessary to send one contribution by chapter. Besides, civil society organizations need to be registered in the CONECCS database to answer or will be asked to provide some basic information about their organisation in each contribution.

A specific website has been launched for the consultation on the Green Paper, which will last until the end of August 2006: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/eti/index_en.htm

You can find the Green Paper on Transparency initiative here:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/commission_barroso/kallas/doc/com2006_0194_4_en.pdf

A briefing of the Green Paper on Transparency initiative, written by the CSCG can be found here: <http://www.act4europe.org/code/en/act4.asp?Page=205&menuPage=205>

"Europe for citizens" programme adopted by the European Parliament

On 4 April, the European Parliament voted "Europe for citizens", a programme promoting EU citizenship and earmarking seven pan- and pro-European think tanks and NGOs to participate in the big projects it will cover. The programme follows the Council decision from January 2004 establishing a EU programme as legal basis for subventions for active citizenship for the transitory period 2004-2006. The Commission proposed three actions: "**Active citizens for Europe**", "**Active civil society for Europe**" and "**All together for Europe**", while the European Parliament added a fourth action, "**An active European memory**". The Council reduced the budget proposed by the Parliament for this programme and changed the financing repartition. According to the Council at least 47% of the programme budget should be used for citizenship activities and at least 29% should support civil society organizations.

You can find the programme here:

<http://www.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade3?PUBREF=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2006-0076+0+DOC+PDF+VO//FR&L=FR&LEVEL=2&NAV=S&LSTDOC=Y&LSTDOC=N>

European Economic and Social Committee launches civil society award

On 25 April, the European Economic and Social Committee agreed to the **organization of a 20,000 euro annual prize for civil society**. It is intended to reward and encourage intellectual work and concrete action on a theme set each year by the Presidency of the EESC. The 2006 EESC Prize seeks to acknowledge and promote initiatives, which make a significant contribution to the enhancing and reinforcing European identity as a cultural element essential for European integration. More information about this topic can be found here:

http://eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/cp/docs/2006/cp_eesc_043_2006_en.doc

4. "PERIOD OF REFLECTION" ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

EU Institutions news

European Commission presents the "Citizens' Agenda: Delivering results for Europe" for the June Council

European Commission presented its evaluation of the EU's "period of reflection" on 10 May 2006, through two communications: "**The period of reflection and plan D**" and "**A Citizens'Agenda. Delivering results for Europe**". The Communication on "The period of reflection and plan D" provides a synthesis of debates with particular reference to the lessons that can be learnt from Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. The European Commission elaborated plan D in October 2005 to encourage new ways to draw citizens into the debate on the future of Europe. Member States remained primarily responsible for the organisation of debates at national, regional and local levels, while the role of the Commission was to help structure the debate. In May 2006, the Commission mentions on a positive note the number of debates and fora, organized at EU, national and regional level, but considers that EU Institutions must better involve citizens in the policy process at all levels. In the communication "A Citizens' Agenda. Delivering results for Europe", the Commission announces its intentions to rebuild trust in the EU by concentrating on "delivery" and hopes that this will prepare the ground for another institutional round in 2008.

Communication on "The period of reflection and Plan D", COM (2006) 212 final, 10 May 2006: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/dossier/selection.htm>

Communication "A Citizens'Agenda. Delivering results for Europe", COM (2006) 211 final, 10 May 2006: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/com_2006_211_en.pdf

Joint parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe puts collaboration between European and national parliaments in the limelight

On 8-9 May, nearly 250 members of the European Parliament and EU national parliaments gathered in Brussels to discuss the future of Europe. On this occasion, Commission President Barroso announced that the Commission would send all its legislative proposals directly to Member States' Parliaments at the same time as to the European Parliament. Concerning the future of Europe, European Parliament president Josep Borrell called for a "**period of proposals**" to follow the "period of reflection". Another period might be necessary for the **clarification of proposals**, as participants manifested their doubts that June Summit might come to clear conclusions about what has to be done in the countries that said "no" to the Constitutional Treaty. Despite the conviction that the June summit could not bring precise timetable, calls for patience and optimism were launched and consensus was expressed on the importance of collaboration between national parliaments and European parliament in listening to citizens.

Foreign affairs ministers want a solution to the constitutional crisis by 2009

On 27-28 May, during a meeting in Klosterneuburg- Austria on the future of the EU, foreign affairs ministers of EU Member States agreed on the need to find a solution to the current constitutional crisis by 2009 at the latest, without detailing how this is to be achieved. The German government, taking over the rotating presidency in January 2007, is expected to put forward concrete proposals on how to proceed until June 2007. These might also include a name change. EU foreign ministers did not endorse the idea of President Barroso to sign a solemn declaration on the EU's goals and values on the occasion of the 50 years anniversary of the European Community in 2007, neither his proposal to extend qualified majority voting in the area of justice and criminal matters by using the "bridging clause". The extension of the "reflection period" is set to be included in the conclusions of the EU June summit.

European Economic and Social Committee launches recommendations for June Summit

On 17-18 May, the European Economic and Social Committee called the heads of States and Governments to send a clear message during the June Summit on the future of Europe and to open new ways to overcome the actual constitutional crisis. The European Economic and Social Committee appreciates that **solutions to the actual crisis should preserve the progress and equilibrium reached in the Constitutional Treaty**. It also reminds European leaders not to forget that, so far 15 from 25 Member States have ratified the Constitutional Treaty. The opinion launches several recommendations concerning especially:

- **Better European governance**, by pressing ahead with the most innovative aspects of the constitutional treaty, with an enhanced role for civil society organisations
- **Fleshing out Community policies and European citizenship, and developing real common policies** in areas where the added value of the European dimension no longer needs to be demonstrated
- **Using the bridging clauses in the Nice Treaty** providing for a transition to qualified majority voting in certain areas of social policy and justice and home affairs
- **The development by Member States of a credible and consistent European information policy** based on networks of civil society organizations

Eurobarometer survey reveals declining support for European project

On 5 May, the Commission presented a new Eurobarometer survey on the future of Europe, which formed the basis of the Commission communications for the June Summit. The survey reveals that only a relative majority of interviewed people (39% versus 27%) considers things going in the right direction for the EU. Support for membership of the EU is at its lowest levels and traditionally pro-European people consider now EU as too technocratic and inefficient. Despite the fact that Europeans are critical about the performance of the EU in most areas, they would like to see more EU in all policy areas, which could indicate that they see the need for a different EU, with real responsibilities and other priorities. 47% of the citizens see globalisation as a threat to employment and companies in their country, while opinions about the consequences of enlargement are divided.

You can find the Eurobarometer results at:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_251_en.pdf

Member States news

French Government proposals for a smoother-functioning EU

On 25 April, the French Government submitted proposals to the Austrian EU presidency for a smoother-functioning EU on the basis of existing treaties. The proposals made were among others to end national vetoes in justice and home affairs, police cooperation and workers' protection rules and to boost the union's capacity to act on the world stage, concentrating on an enhanced role for the EU's foreign policy chief. The **proposals are in line with earlier French ideas of modifying individual parts of the constitution**. At the core of Paris' proposals is the use of the so-called "bridging" clauses in the current EU treaty, which allows shifting policy areas from unanimous decision-making to majority voting, effectively eliminating the national veto.

Denmark in favour of a new Constitutional Treaty and calls for simplification of EU

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Danish Prime Minister delivered his version of the way ahead for the EU, in a policy speech at the University of Copenhagen on 21 April. He thinks that the period of reflection that the European Council decided in June 2005 will most likely be prolonged at the June 2006 Summit as there "will be no clarification in the immediate future". Rasmussen found it more probable that the reflections will eventually lead to the start of talks on a new treaty. This new one should concentrate on concrete political projects leading to a "Europe of results". The **former secretary general of the Council, Niels Ersboll**, pushed for more transparency, supported general public access to all meetings, unless it was decided

the meeting should be closed for specific reasons and advocated closer contact between the Commission and national parliaments. The conference results will be published in a report to be presented by Danish Prime Minister to his counterparts at the June summit.

Austrian chancellor makes concrete proposals for the June Summit

Austrian chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel proposed on 9 May a **"roadmap for seven or eight projects with concrete timetables"** that have "symbolic resonance", stressing popular values like sexual equality or setting the basis for a European fire brigade. Manifesting his trust that those projects could help revive the Constitutional Treaty, he contrasted the fact that 16 member states support the constitution with the two French and Dutch rejections last year, hitting a more positive note than the European Commission, which described the status quo as "lack of consensus among member states." Wolfgang Schüssel admitted that 2005 was "catastrophic" for the EU in public opinion terms, but manifested his optimism based also on the latest Eurobarometer survey, which showed that, two thirds of people see it as a peaceful and modern place to live.

Germany does not want to rush reviving the Constitutional Treaty

German chancellor Angela Merkel reaffirmed the German support for the constitutional treaty, but cautioned against moving too quickly on the project, in case the EU is put back in a situation where it "cannot move forward". In her **Europe Day speech on 9 May, she declared that the union should not "rush"** in trying to revive the frozen treaty, also attacking over-regulation and bureaucracy from the EU institutions. A few days later, in her first major **EU policy speech before the German Parliament on 11 May, she said that Europe needs a new reason for its existence**, more in tune with everyday concerns of EU citizens. Angela Merkel also clearly expressed that it would be premature to talk about the priorities of the upcoming German EU presidency in 2007.

Estonia ratifies the Constitutional Treaty

On 9 May, the Estonian Parliament voted 73 in favour of the Constitutional Treaty and one against, with no abstentions. Thus Estonia has become the 15th country to ratify the text. According to **Estonian Foreign Minister, Urmas Paet, the Constitutional Treaty is the best text available at the moment**. He also declared that efficiency and common endeavours should be increased in spheres where it would benefit the security and welfare of the people living in the European Union. The European Commission welcomed the overwhelming support for the EU constitution in the Estonian parliament.

Finnish parliament votes in favour of the Constitutional Treaty, but rejects referendum

On 12 May, an overwhelming majority of Finnish parliamentarians voted in favour of the Constitutional Treaty, paving the way for its ratification before 1 July 2006. The proposal to ratify the Constitution by referendum was rejected. The **Finnish Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen declared he wanted to revive the constitutional process keeping the Constitution in its entirety and not cherry-picking bits and pieces**. On 20 October, the Finnish government wants to hold an informal EU summit on the fate of the Constitution and other issues, such as energy security.

Luxembourg Prime Minister says that a new EU Constitutional Treaty will not be adopted before 2009

On 17 May, during an interview for the Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung, the **Luxembourgish Prime Minister, Claude Juncker expressed his concerns that the "reflection period" might last at least until 2009 or 2010**, even this date being considered too optimistic. He also indicated that he does not expect the German EU presidency of 2007, which Berlin wants to use to promote a revival of the EU constitution, to make a big difference. Luxembourg's leader rejected ideas championed by Belgian Prime

Minister Guy Verhofstadt and French political circles to enhance integration only in a "core" Europe of eurozone states. He also indicated that dying enthusiasm for European integration is not only present among EU leaders, but also among ordinary citizens.

Despite French government's initiatives to reach citizens, French would still vote "no" to EU Constitutional Treaty

On 29 May 2005, 54.7% of the French electorate voted against the European Constitution. Since then, the French government had several initiatives to reach citizens, as for example the latest from **2 May, when the French ministry for Foreign Affairs launched its new Internet portal on Europe** (<http://www.touteleurope.fr/>), with the aim of providing French citizens with information on the EU and its policies and achievements. Despite those efforts, a **survey conducted by polling firm LH2 for the French paper Liberation, released on 17 May, reveals that of those French people who voted "no", 98% "do not regret" their choice.** By contrast, 10% of last year's "yes" voters "regret" their decision while 89% stick to their choice. The same survey shows that three quarters of respondents believe France's "no" "has not changed the course" of European politics, while 6% said the rejection of the treaty has moved the EU "in a more liberal direction." Meanwhile, a majority of those surveyed said the referendum had "not changed" the political weight of France in the world, although a 36% minority said Paris had come out weakened on the world stage.

You can find the opinion poll at:

http://www.lh2.fr/_upload/ressources/sondages/europe/lh2liberationfrançaisreferendum17mai06.pdf.

5. NEWS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP MEMBERS

Newsletters

CONCORD: You can download the April Flash from

<http://www.concordeurope.org/view.cfm?idref=PUB37&tab1=publications>

EFAH: Here you can find May newsletter

<http://www.efah.org/index.php?id=14&pagelang=en>

EPHA: Here you can find the April newsletter on:

<http://www.ephah.org/a/2173>

CONCORD publishes "Joint European NGO Report. EU aid: genuine leadership or misleading figures? An independent analysis of European Governments' aid levels"

The report "EU aid: genuine leadership or misleading figures?" has been produced by a broad collaboration of European NGOs under the umbrella of CONCORD. Contributions were received from all the major European development NGOs, Platforms and Networks of all 25 EU Member States. The report forms part of the follow-up to the Global Call to Action Against Poverty mobilisations in 2005 and argues that European Governments have taken a vital leadership role in international diplomacy on development assistance in recent years. Despite the substantial amount of the world's development assistance provided by European Governments, the briefing shows that, according to CONCORD calculations €13.5 billion – or almost one third – of reported European ODA in 2005 did not provide any new aid for developing countries. The report calls for: a) genuine increases in European aid; b) clear year-on-year timetables to reach 2010 targets; c) tighten official aid reporting rules; d) greater transparency in aid reporting; e) enhanced allocation and quality of aid. Current aid reporting rules are set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which European Governments to regularly include spending on debt relief as aid and to count spending on refugees and foreign students in their own countries as ODA. The conclusion of the report is that this must be changed immediately in order to prevent Governments from misleadingly inflating aid figures.

The report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.concordeurope.org/download.cfm?media=pdfuk&id=1410>

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