

BULLETIN 20
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ACT4EUROPE CAMPAIGN

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends,

The European Council on December 12 and 13, that was supposed to reach a final agreement on the European Constitution, closed without result. Many delegates speak of “cold shower”, “failure”, or “crisis of the European project”. Whatever the assessment of this “outcome” might be – we do not have any Constitution for the moment, and it is not even sure when another IGC will debate it.

It is quite disappointing – and worrying – that contents that we have fought for have not even been discussed during the IGC. The crucial issue was, once again, the voting system in the Council and it became clear very soon that no agreement could be reached on this issue. The European Council thus ended surprisingly early on Saturday after lunchtime.

However, no clear timetable for the discussions on a Constitution has been decided upon. And it seems to be very probable that another IGC will not be convened before autumn 2004.

On the positive side, the worst of the possible solutions has been avoided: A compromise that further waters down the Convention’s draft. However, there are two dangers in the outcome of last weekend. Firstly, to restart from

scratch means that all that has been campaigned for and achieved so far cannot be taken for granted. Secondly, with the prospect of an unclear timetable that extends discussions over the next months (maybe even until 2005 as stated by some) the Constitutional project risks losing its salience and, thereby, contributing to the disillusion of politicians and, even worse, of European citizens.

We will continue our campaigns thinking about strategies in order to assure that the project will be further discussed taking into account the claims of Civil Society and that it does not get lost somewhere on the way. It is important that the positive achievements of the Convention's draft as the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights or participatory elements remain parts of this project.

Basically: We all still have lots more to do after having digested the weekend's outcome!

All the best for your campaigns – we will be in touch in the New Year with more information.

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IGC – OUTCOME OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL 12 AND 13 DECEMBER

Outcome and prospects of the European Council

We have fought for many issues in the Draft Constitutional Treaty – none of them have been discussed during this weekend. It became clear very quickly that bilateral talks and Italian compromises could not help to achieve an agreement on the voting system in the Council. The European Heads of States were very cautious after the "failure" of the summit and avoided of blaming one delegation or another of being responsible for this "non" outcome. Romano PRODI concludes that an agreement was not possible because a "European spirit" is still missing among many Member States. With National interests prevailing, the European project is in danger. However one might call the result of this weekend, it is a shame, that the whole project is now on ice because of one issue – even if this is not too surprising, as Poland (and to some degree Spain) on the one side, and Germany and France on the other made clear before that they would not move on this issue.

The assessments of this result differ – but words like “failure”, “defeat”, or “disappointing outcome” prevail. Some do not want to see a “tragedy” or “disaster” in it pointing out that this is surely not the best but at the same time not the worst solution. While a viable agreement close to the Draft of the Convention / the compromise of the Italian Presidency would have been desirable, a “bad” compromise like in Nice on a watered down Constitution would have been worst option.

There are several consequences of this. If the project – now “on ice” – should fail decisively in 2004, some countries see Europe in a crisis with the prospect of a two speed Europe gaining importance (D, F, BENELUX). A “hard core” of “pioneer groups” around the founding states would move further on taking on board those who are keen on pushing forward European integration. Others still believe that an agreement is possible and should be debated upon without “pressure”.

Regarding a roadmap for the Constitution, no agreement has been reached. The Irish Presidency will initiate discussions between Member States gathering their different point of views in a consultation period. This should be finished by March 2004, the next European Council, and the Irish Presidency then would give recommendations for the future discussions. It seems sure that no further IGC will be convened under the Irish Presidency as there would be a “jam” with the enlargement taking place 1 of May and the European Parliament’s elections in June 2004. Therefore, another IGC is more likely to meet in autumn 2004 under the Dutch Presidency – or even only in 2005 under the Luxembourg Presidency as the Swedish Prime minister suggests.

Some are nevertheless sceptical on the possible outcome on the Irish consultation period as all points of views were already “on the table” this weekend and it is difficult to conceive why they would change by then. The fact that Spanish and Polish elections will be held during 2004 would make an agreement thereafter more probable as the candidates would not have to position themselves on the Constitution outcome in the middle of their electoral campaign. The MEP Elmar BROK, the European Parliament’s representative to the IGC, suggested to call upon the Convention again to discuss about the last contentious issues such as the voting system for the Council.

The whole project now being on ice means that also the positive parts of it, as the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights or the participatory elements, will have to wait before being implemented. Our next steps of campaigning will therefore have to ensure that the positive contents of the Constitutions achieved so far do not get lost over the quarrels on institutional issues, that the overall project of a European Constitution does not lose of its importance and salience and finally that the European citizens do not get even more disillusioned about it. It will be important to call upon decision-makers to make clear statements / commitments that these non-institutional

issues will not be neglected over the row on the institutional framework of the EU.

act4europe Campaign

Press Release on "Failure" of IGC / European Council

The following Press Release has been sent out Saturday 13 afternoon right after the information of the failure of the European Council being official. According to our contacts in the Press we were amongst the first to react and therefore assured a prominent place within the debate in the Press after the summit.

New Faces, Same Old Blues

Civil Society denounces the EU Summit.

Civil Society denounces the renewed bout of national horse-trading, which led to the collapse the EU Constitution. The Constitutional project was going to be about bringing Europe closer to the people, yet heads of government failed to take citizens' interest into consideration and just could not accept the careful compromise the Convention had drawn up.

"The IGC made progress in including gender equality and social exclusion in their draft, but now it has all come down to horse-trading about votes. It was just like Nice, and that was not very nice. Instead of focusing on the issues which people care about, here they spent all their time divvying up the chairs around the table. Civil Society is fed up with these antics. Just like in Cancun, they have woken up to find that there is no table to sit around!" said Giampiero Alhadeff (SOLIDAR), Chair of the Civil Society Contact Group that brings together the four large NGO sector platforms (environment – Green 8, social – Social Platform, development - CONCORD, human rights – HR NGO network) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). "It is good that some of the leaders are sounding optimistic, but it is hard to imagine how they will pull back from the deadlock they have got to today", added Mary Mc Phail (EWL), representative of the Social Platform.

For more information on the joint demands of the largest civil society platform, please contact chair of the Contact Group, Giampiero Alhadeff or the coordinator, Nicolas Berger, coordinator@act4europe.org.