



A CAMPAIGN OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY
CONTACT GROUP

BULLETIN 25

Brussels, 02 April 2004

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EDITORIAL

A week of "intelligence" work after the grand summit decision to re-convene the IGC has made a few things clearer, but not given us much hope that the time will be used to the benefit of citizens' interests in environment, human and social rights, development, and women's equality.

Work will start in May with further bilateral talks between Bertie Ahern and his counterparts. As far as we know, there will be no extra IGC meetings of Foreign Ministers or Heads of States, the outstanding issue will mostly be solved by focal point meetings of civil servants. These include areas like energy, social cohesion, ECJ control etc., about a third of the post-Naples document is still open. The General Affairs Council (Foreign Ministers) will decide on a prepared package and will only look at a hand full of big political issues – all of which are fairly irrelevant to the European project from the point of view of rights and value based NGOs. Adoption is foreseen for the June summit, thus ignoring the importance of Enlargement and the EP elections. Welcome back to the good old ways of negotiating treaties: technicians and diplomats behind closed doors. Good news is that apparently (but not definitely) the horizontal social clause and gender equality in art. 2 (second part) are among the seemingly agreed points. But no news on our other core issues so far.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ACTION AGAIN! Try and find out who will be going to the focal point meetings from your country (and your permanent rep-

resentation) and see whether you can give technical input to them. It will be important to contribute to their work, they are not the recipients of political messages only. Letters to Foreign Ministers will be helpful too, but the show is happening at another level. Try and build alliances with MPs, so the process and the issues can be dragged into the open. The sooner we all know what is actually on which table and when, the better for all of us. Let us know if you gather any news. Particularly important is work targeted at the Irish Presidency now, who is responsible for drawing all the strings together.

We are entering one of the hottest European phases ever. Not only the Constitution, but also the elections, a new Commission, and the sudden fundamental changes in civil liberties after Madrid. Civil Society has to move quickly now on many levels. The sudden change in mind of European Heads of State towards the Constitutional project is to be welcomed – but with caution. It reveals a rather worrying mind-set of national leaders reacting to tragic events rather than being proactive for the EU. Heads of government have shown more than once reluctance to move to any proper cooperation (the failure of the December IGC being a recent example), but that they can be quick in finding “ready made” solutions to problems such as terrorism. This new package may bring positive publicity but is a rather short-term simplistic solution to complex problems. Wholesale surveillance of everyone, denying data protection, clamping down on all asylum seekers etc. is not the answer to a much needed protection against atrocities such as the attack of Madrid. Terrorism has to be fought by unity, cooperation, and trust, certainly on a security level, but most importantly on a level of eradicating poverty and injustice in the world, by an anti-racist and anti-xenophobic dialogue with the huge majority of non-violent Muslims in Europe, and by addressing the consequences of European policies, such as agriculture, on communities across the world. The reconvening of the IGC should be a chance to establish long-term solutions based on recognition of the duties owed by the EU to its own citizens. Now could have been the chance to do quick but substantial work on improving rights in the Constitution and laying the ground work to long-lasting measures against attacks on people’s lives *and* on their liberties. Yet it seems that is not on the agenda! A last loud round of civil society opinions about the Constitution, a critical force in the EP elections, and information work during ratification will be a crucial task for NGOs across Europe.

And last but not least there is a bit of internal news to be shared: the Civil Society Contact Group has broadened its membership to 5 NGO sectors and is currently negotiating with a 6th. And the EP toolkit will be available in more languages next week (German, Spanish, French, Estonian). It has been downloaded from our site more than 4000 times during the first two weeks of its publication.

Nicolas Beger
Coordinator
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NEWS ON IGC¹

As reported in our last bulletin, all official voices consider the talks on the eve of the Spring Summit, when the Irish Presidency convened the Heads of State to talk about the Constitution, to be a real breakthrough – European Parliament’s President Cox says the deadlock has been broken. However, **when and how the supposedly final talks on the Constitution will take place has not been officially announced.**

Ahern underlines that it is unlikely that the Constitution will be agreed before the June Summit – for the Council the vote of people during EP elections is not particularly important it seems. There are no plans to hold further ministerial meetings of the IGC, Ahern speaks of continued Presidency consultation and a “**capital tour early May**”. He does not want to convene an additional summit that deals with 24 or 25 points still outstanding, there will not be an IGC meeting of Heads of State before the June summit, thus **signing the Constitution before enlargement or elections is almost out of the question.**

Through some internal channels we have heard that the **post-Naples document**, announced to be the basis for negotiation besides the Convention text, is **about two-thirds agreed**. The missing third has some big political issues (voting, QMV, Commissioners), which will be decided by the Foreign Ministers in the General Affairs Council a week before the June summit. Everything else that is still contentious, such as energy, Presidency of the Council, ECJ control in some areas, economic and social cohesion etc. will be dealt with by **Focal Point Meetings** in Ireland during May. These are attended by the **relevant civil servants from the national ministries** and the idea is to actually find agreement on that level and present the General Affairs Council with a document that solves almost everything apart from the few political issues. **Congratulations, we are back to negotiating treaties through technicians** and transparency bears no relation to the process besides starting with a t as well.

The European Parliament is overwhelmingly pleased with the decision to continue the IGC. Andrew Duff underlines that there is still danger in the UK’s demands on restriction of QMV in Justice and Home Affairs and the demands of some States to curtail the European Parliament’s budgetary powers has not been defeated – both must be fought against. Nearly all MEPs agree that a deal should be made before the Parliament elections in order to put the Constitutional text before the electorate for its approval. Many MEPS still suggest an agreement for 9 May, the anniversary of the Schuman declaration on European integration. The Green group’s presidents insist once more that the revision of the Constitution has to be under QMV especially for the third

¹ Information mostly from Agence Europe, EU observer and official European Union information websites.

part (policies). Although neither date nor results are clear, the Parliament already discusses where the Constitution should be signed: in a resolution it decided with a small majority that it should be **Madrid** instead of Rome (which was the plan before). Dublin as the capital of the current Presidency is a possible option as is Brussels since it hosts the June summit.

The act4europe campaign

Translations of EP election toolkit

The act4europe toolkit around the European elections in June 2004 has so far been quite a success. It has been downloaded more than 4000 times in the first two weeks after its publication. We are still updating with new information on candidates / parties in the Member States. Please do let us know if you come across any information on candidates on your country that haven't been included in the toolkit so far. We are finalizing **translations in German, Spanish and French** and will be able to put them on the web by next week. We hope to be able to add **Estonian and Polish** soon. Please check out the [website](#) for the updated versions.

The Civil Society Contact Group

Civil Society Contact Group has a new member

Following a request by the European Women's Lobby last December, the Civil Society Contact Group has during its meeting on 25 March decided to accept EWL as a full member. EWL will be representing the sector of women's equality and women's voice in European organized civil society. It has committed itself to liaising with other European women's NGOs inside and outside the other 4 NGO sectors to assure a broad representation of the issue within the Civil Society Contact Group.