

act4europe

A CAMPAIGN OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY
CONTACT GROUP

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends

One can truly say that given the agreement on the Constitution the silence of act4europe bulletin has been long. This is partly due to a large amount of activities in the office, but mainly because the consultation within the sectors on a thorough assessment of the Constitution is not completed yet. We will publish the sector assessments as they are finalised in the bulletin and on the web site, and look forward to a complete joint assessment by the end of October. This will find entry into the 4th and final act4europe toolkit on helping NGOs find their way in national ratification debates.

Act4europe will continue its activities during the ratification phase (although our funding is not secured beyond 2004) with the aim of making available precise analysis of the Constitution text in relation to our concerns to aid NGOs in assessing the political direction they want to take during ratification, particularly in the referenda countries. The ratification toolkit will be one activity, the three capacity seminars for NGOs in Slovenia, Hungary, and Poland another. We will continue the bulletin and will organise a NGO conference on ratification debates to be held in Brussels in early December. Please refer to the activities section further down.

The Civil Society Contact Group has not decided on its final political stance in relation to ratification, but will do so as soon as the sector assessments are completed. Generally speaking, the Convention and the IGC have both failed to fulfil their aim of bringing Europe closer to its citizens. Yet, their efforts in this direction certainly have to be assessed separately; the Convention process has at least earned a star on making a good attempt. There was civil dialogue and its transparency was a first in EU history. The IGC on the contrary has failed abysmally at any effort in civil dialogue and in "selling" the project and the need of a Constitution to the people. Heads of State continued to hackle over national interests seemingly completely aloof from what actually concerns the majority of 480 million EU citizens, who care little about 2-3% more or less in QMV, but a lot about employment, social rights, improvement of the environment, and a future of peace and solidarity. The EP elections have shown that the common national government strategy of "blame the bad on Brussels, claim the good as your own achievement" and conducting election campaigns along national themes only blow-up in the face of Europe: we have an EP with important powers, but it is far from being representative with 45% turn-out. If the ratification debates, particularly where they involve referenda, are conducted in the same way as the European elections, then Europe will have a pretty piece of paper, but no Constitution. But if this Constitution shall be more than a waste of paper, there has to be a real and honest effort to explain its content and to give people an opportunity to assess its European value. This is a huge responsibility of many actors: Governments, National Parliaments, the Commission, the European Parliament, the press, but also of civil society.

European NGO networks will take responsibility in continuing to make as much critical and precise information available to their constituencies at national, regional and local level as possible. We have to keep the alliances alive and aid each other across Europe in deciding how we can make our voices heard in a difficult political and tabloid press climate. Citizens will need much more diverse information on key issues which interest and concern them, such as, for example, the fight against poverty, sustainable employment, improvement of the environment and eradication of outdated nuclear and agricultural policy, social inclusion, a fair aid system for people not bound to military government tactics, ensuring the equality of all people, full participation opportunities for women, and the respect for human rights standards above economic concerns. Now is not the time to stop campaigning, alliance building, and resources on the Constitution process.

Ratification will be a problem of conveying complex information – how to explain the progress in the values and objectives, in the horizontal clauses of Part III, the equilibrium of external policies and development aid, or the chapter on Participatory Democracy, while admitting at the same time that the Charter has been watered down, we still have no QMV for anti-discrimination, Euratom is unchanged, and there are too many QMV restrictions in judicial cooperation?

It will be difficult to deal with the necessary political pragmatism of realising that a “no” will not in reality lead to an re-opening of content negotiations at all, but only to dropping the project and continuing on the basis of Nice, which is the worst alternative. Accepting or not accepting will unfortunately have little consequence on real content. Plus, Heads of State will move on in the areas they are interested in. The ink on the Constitution is not dry yet and there are concrete plans to implement the defence agency, the diplomatic service, and judiciary cooperation on terrorism and crimes. There are no such plans on the table for the issues that civil society will promote as success of the Constitution: values and objectives, the inclusion of the Charter, participatory democracy etc. Will we see a two-speed Union after all in terms of policies *and* of countries that participate? Once more the greatest challenge of the EU ahead is not its common defence policy, but whether it can in the foreseeable future become a Union of its citizens.

Nicolas Beger
Coordinator
Civil Society Contact Group
Act4europe campaign

NEWS ON RATIFICATION¹

Referenda

The deal was struck during the Council meeting with no surprises in relation to the IGC documents published before. You can find the final text of the Treaty on our web site under the news section. After many different announcements in the aftermath of the Council meeting, the date for signing has finally been set for 20th October 2004 in Rome.

The developments in relation to referenda are moving along fast. So far referenda are announced or are discussed for: UK (early 2006), France (second half 2005), Netherlands (late 2004), Poland, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and the Czech Republic.

If you are interested in arguments pro referenda or would like to find out about general rules of good practice for referenda, then please refer to the web site of the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe (www.iri-europe.org).

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

Ratification activities

Ratification, and particularly the referenda campaigns, will be entirely a national level activity. Act4europe will aim to provide concrete, in-depth, and fair information on the Constitutional Treaty, without pre-judging the political stance NGOs might wish to take in their national settings. We will provide NGOs with the assessments of the sectors as soon as there are published via the bulletin and our web site. By mid November we hope to be able to publish our 4th and final NGO toolkit with those assessments, a general political assessment of the Contact Group, information about referenda, and tools for participating in the highly complex debates. We will translate the toolkit into some EU language as far as our funding permits, but will, as usual, appreciate any offers of translations. Please contact Vanda Knowles at assistant@act4europe.org if you can offer translations or wish to find information on this toolkit before its publication.

Capacity building seminars in Slovenia, Hungary, and Poland

The Time to act4europe Programme funded by the European Commission and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation includes the possibility for three national seminars, which will be conducted in Slovenia (20. September), Hungary (26. October), Poland (15./16. November). The aims are to facilitate debate on participatory democracy/civil dialogue at national and EU level, to increase knowledge about the EU Constitution with respect to social, human rights, environment, development, culture, and gender equality issues, to facilitate debate about how rights and value based NGOs can participate in national ratification processes, and to increase trust for joint cross-sectoral NGO work at national and EU level. The programmes are designed individually in liaison with the project partners in Lubljana (CNVOS), Budapest (NIOK), and Warsaw (OSKA). If you need further information please contact the act4europe office or the project partners. The invitation for the Slovenian seminar is circulated with this bulletin, please feel free to send it to your members in Slovenia or other interested NGOs.

Act4europe is also a project partner to Czech NGOs who are implementing a Commission funded project on ratification, and we will give a training seminar in Prague on 9. October. Please contact Tereza Horejsova [horejsova@integrace.cz] for further information on this seminar.

NGO conference on Ratification, December 2004

The Civil Society Contact Group and act4europe will organize a NGO conference in Brussel to facilitate pan-European NGO debate about the outcome of the Constitution and the role of NGOs in the ratification process. The conference will take place in early December. There will be funds for national participation. Registration will open in late September, for further information contact Vanda Knowles at assistant@act4europe.org

Civil Society Contact Group

Open meeting on Article I-46 on June 14

The Civil Society Contact Group held a meeting on the implementation of Article I-46 in the Draft Treaty in June. It aimed at bringing together NGOs from different sectors and draw up first concrete ideas about how Civil Society wants this article to be shaped.

The Coordinator of the Civil Society Contact Group also gave a paper at the Federal Trust Constitution Conference in London, 1st and 2nd July, on civil dialogue and art. 46. You can find the paper on our web site.

Reception for MEPs in Strassbourg, 20th July 2004

The NGO sectors in the Civil Society Contact Group organised an official reception for the new European Parliament together with the ETUC on 20 July in Strassbourg. The event was attended by many MEPs from all Member States and political groupings and lasted over 2 hours. It gave ample opportunity for MEPs and NGO directors to meet, re-affirm established working relations and create new ones. A pre-printed version of the MEP handbook on ENGOs was also distributed and perished quickly. We welcome all new MEPs once more and are looking forward to continuing the productive relations established before.

Civil Society Handbook for MEPs to be published early September

With 2/3 of the EP fresh, many contacts and working relationships between MEPs and NGOs have to be rebuilt. The Civil Society Contact Group is in the process of publishing a book called “The European Parliament 2004-2009 and European Civil Society: A guide for partnership”, which will appear in its official version in three languages (EN, DT, FR) in September. It introduces the concept of civil dialogue with the European Parliament, emphasises the positive developments and the role of MEPs in this dialogue, and gives an overview over the areas of expertise of the 6 NGO sectors and the demands for the 2004-2009 Parliamentary Period. It concludes with a comprehensive contact list of ENGO networks as a reference guide. The book will be distributed to all MEPs and to the NGO sectors, and will also be available on the act4europe web site.

New policy assistant hired

After the sad “loss” of Markus Held – who has begun his new position as coordinator of CEV (a Member of the Social Platform) – this week, we have been lucky in finding a highly competent replacement: Vanda Knowles. Vanda is British, speaks fluently French, German, and Polish, and worked as an assistant to Gisela Stuart during the Convention. She has an academic background in International Relations and

European Studies. She will take up her post on 1 September and we are very much looking forward to working with her.

The Civil Society Contact Group would like to extend a very warm thank you to Markus for his amazing commitment, skill, and knowledge! It has been a pleasure working with him and we wish him the very best for his future career, which will hopefully remain close to us.

APPENDIX: Draft programme for act4europe seminar in Ljubljana

Also available in Slovenian from CNVOS



Draft Programme for act4europe seminar in Ljubljana

Act4europe is a campaign of the EU Civil Society Contact Group. The Civil Society Contact Group brings together 6 large EU NGO sectors – environment (Green 8), human rights (HRDN), women (EWL), culture (EFAH), social (Social Platform), and development (CONCORD) – with the European Trade Union Confederation as Observer. Act4europe is designed to facilitate information and exchange between NGOs at national and European level around the debate on the Future of Europe. It aims to advocate lasting access to information, public participation in decision-making (participatory democracy and civil dialogue), a more democratic structure, and access to justice in matters of concern to civil society. Act4europe runs a programme, funded by the EU Commission and the Mott Foundation, to re-connect NGOs at national level to EU affairs of their concern and promote their capacity to participate in civil dialogue across Europe. Under this programme, act4europe, organises training seminars for NGOs in the New Member States. In partnership with CNVOS, we invite Slovenian NGOs from the 6 NGO sectors, to participate in a one-day training seminar in Ljubljana.

Date: 20. September

Place: City Hotel Ljubljana, Dalmatinova 15, Ljubljana 1000.

Cost: participation in the seminar is free of charge, lunch will be provided. There is a limited amount of travel subsistence available to NGOs based outside of Ljubljana. Please contact Julija Skarabot - cnvos@mail.ljudmila.org at CNVOS for further information.

Registration: please register with Julija Skarabot - cnvos@mail.ljudmila.org at CNVOS no later than 15. September

Participation is restricted to 30-40 NGO participants

Language: Most of the training will be conducted in English, but simultaneous interpretation into/from Slovenian can be made available to ensure participation for everybody. Please indicate upon registration whether you need interpretation services.

Aim and objectives of the seminar:

- Facilitate debate on participatory democracy/civil dialogue at national and EU level.
- Increase knowledge about the EU Constitution with respect to social, human rights, environment, development, culture, and gender equality issues.
- Facilitate debate about how rights and value based NGOs can participate in national ratification processes.
- Increase trust for joint NGO work at national and EU level.

Draft Programme:

9:00 – 9:15 Welcome on behalf of act4europe and CNVOS

9:15 – 9:45: Introduction of the participants and their expectations

9:45 – 11:00 Introduction by act4europe

- EU institutions and their relevance for NGO work
- Constitution process
- Participatory democracy
- EU NGO structures and joint work

Question and discussion time

11- 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 12:30 Advocacy techniques

- What are the essential tools?
- How can EU issues and legislation be utilised for national concerns
- Campaign and project planning

12:30 – 13:00 Exchange on advocacy techniques in small groups

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16:00 EU and national level: trust, joint work, and systems of civil dialogue

- Presentation by CNVOS on Slovenian civil dialogue
- Guided discussion in working groups of 5 people
- What is the advocacy environment at national level?

- How can civil dialogue be further developed at national level?
- How does that experience relate to EU level, what will EU civil dialogue bring?
- Brief round of discussion results (flip charted)

16:00 – 16:30 Coffee break

16:30 – 18:30 The EU Constitution: NGOs in the ratification process

- Sector specific theme groups on the content of the Constitution
- Flip charted results for a post-seminar summary