

act4europe

A CAMPAIGN OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY
CONTACT GROUP

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NEWS

EU European Affairs Ministers - Informal Meeting on 'Communicating Europe' – 5 October 2004

How citizens can become more involved in Europe and how to increase voter participation in EP elections and referenda are two of the points on the agenda for discussion by the EU's European Affairs Ministers in Amsterdam on 5 October. Hosted by Dutch Europe Minister Mr. Atzo Nikolaï, the meeting will also include representatives from the European Commission and the European Parliament. (*Agence Europe*)

EP hearing with NGOs on Constitutional Treaty

The Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament will hold a hearing with NGOs on 25 November on the subject of the Constitutional Treaty. **Act4europe** and the six ENGO networks it represents (Social Platform, CONCORD, Green 8, HRDN, EFAH, EWL) welcome this extremely important initiative and hope to be able to participate fully in the process. The EU CSCG has written to Jo Leinen about the process of the hearing.

EP to vote on Constitution report by end of year

In a speech to the European Parliament on 14 September, President Josep Borrell called for the EP to become a large-scale FORUM and a model for open, pluralistic and democratic debate. The European Parliament will draw up a report, with Richard Corbett and Inigo Mendez de Vigo as rapporteurs, which, on the suggestion of the Committee on Institutional Affairs, will be put to the vote by the end of the year.

(www.europarl.eu.int)

ETUC appeals to workers to vote in favour of the Constitution

In an interview with *Le Monde* on 17 July 2004 Secretary General of the ETUC, John Monks, described the Constitution as a step forward for the workers, welcoming the reference to full employment, progress in terms of social dialogue, and the requirement for a social summit. (*Agence Europe*)

ACT4EUROPE

Capacity Building Seminar – Slovenia, 20 September

The first of three act4europe NGO capacity building seminars to take place before the end of the year was held in Ljubljana on Monday 20 September. The program contained sessions on EU institutions, NGO structures, Lobbying techniques, Participatory Democracy, and the outcome of the Constitutional Treaty text according to NGO sectors' concerns. 40 Slovenian NGOs participated, the organising NGO centre CNVOS was present with board members and staff, and had managed to bring the national TV to the event as well as the representative of the EU Commission in Slovenia. The evaluation of the seminar was very positive on content and the need for such information from and about European NGO work, but also with respect to the opportunity to meet with so many Slovenian NGOs from all sectors.

Seminars to follow in Budapest and Warsaw...

Preparations are already well underway for the Budapest seminar (26 October) and the provisional programme can be found on our website. Details will also follow shortly for the Warsaw seminar on 15-16 November.

Act4europe invited to Talinn and Prague

In addition to the three seminars **act4europe** is organising, there are another two events being organised by partners in which **act4europe** is participating.

- **1 October 2004 – Talinn, Estonia.**

Roundtable discussion on participatory democracy.

- **9 October 2004 – Prague, Czech Republic.**

Conference and Training Seminar organised by Europaeum/NROS. Act4europe will present during the conference and the training seminar will be entirely conducted by act4europe together with a trainer from the European Women's Lobby. The seminar will cover amongst others: the link between EU policy and the national level, how European NGOs are structured, EU decision making processes, civil dialogue, and lobbying techniques. The afternoon will be spent in a simulation exercise in which participants practically interact with EU institutions, media, and business on the new directive on equality between women and men.

Act4europe Conference – December 2004 NGOs, Ratifying the Constitutional Treaty and Participatory Democracy

The date for the conference has still to be set, however we expect it to take place in early December. It is being planned in two parts: The first will focus on ratification and will provide an opportunity for national NGOs to take part in an assessment of the Constitutional Treaty, encouraging both cross-sectoral and thematic consideration of the main issues. To complement this, there will be a session in the afternoon with a political panel on participatory democracy, civil dialogue, governance and relations between the institutions and NGOs.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

New Contact Group Chair

John Hontelez is the new Chair of the EU Civil Society Contact Group. John is Secretary General of the European Environmental Bureau and is one of the two representatives of the Green 8 on the Contact Group. John will retain the chair of the CG until September 2005.

Civil Society Handbook for MEPs

After a slight delay due to a design hitch the final handbook is being printed and will be available by the end of September. The handbook 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 of the areas of expertise of the 6 NGO sectors and the demands for the 2004-2009 Parliamentary Period. It also includes a comprehensive contact list of ENGOs. As well as being distributed to all MEPs, the new Commissioners and the Member State Permanent Representations to the EU, it will also be available to download from our website.

Sector Analysis by end October

By the end of October the most of the sectors will be in a position to give a final assessment of the Constitution text decided by the IGC. As these become available we will post them on the act4europe website.

CSCG Letter to Barroso

After reading that the Commission President designate, Mr Barroso wanted to exchange views with social partners and representatives of civil society before he takes up office in the Autumn, the CSCG has written him a letter requesting a meeting.

CSCG Letter to Wallström

Margot Wallström will take up the position of Commissioner in charge of communication. The CSCG has written a letter to her asking for a meeting to explore her ideas of relations between the Commission and civil society, participatory democracy, communicating the Constitutional Treaty, governance, and sustainable development.

RATIFICATION UPDATE

In this regular section, we will try to keep abreast of the developments across the EU25 with regard to the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. There is also a new section on our website on ratification, which will also provide updated information as it becomes available. If you are aware of any other developments that we have not mentioned/covered, please let us know. (assistant@act4europe.org).

Czech Republic

30.08.04 PM Gross announced that the Czech Republic might hold the referendum at the same time as its national general elections in June 2006. This first has to be agreed by any coalition partners that may be involved in a new government. (*EUobserver*)

Estonia

02.09.04 The government has decided not to hold a referendum and to ratify through the parliament instead. (*EUobserver*)

Finland

27.08.04 The Finish Social Democrats have announced that they are against a referendum on the Constitution, which makes it unlikely that the country will hold one. The Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen had already stated that the Constitution did not change the EU enough to make a referendum necessary. (*EUobserver*)

France

25.08.04 In an interview with Le Figaro, French socialist Jean-Pierre Chevenement has said that the European Constitution frightens him. Economically it is too liberal and it will prevent France from having an

independent defence policy, the EU common defence having to be compatible with NATO security policy. Reinforced cooperation needs the agreement of the EP and the Council, making a flexible Europe impossible. (*EUobserver*)

7.08.04 The French Socialist party will take a decision in December on whether or not to support the European Constitution. Party leader Francois Hollande hopes his party will finally say yes, however were the referendum to be tied to the fate of Jacques Chirac in any way, they would have to say no. (*EUobserver*)

07.09.04 Prime Minister Raffarin and Francois Hollande, leader of the socialist opposition, have announced they will campaign together for a yes vote on the European Constitution. (*EUobserver*)

09.09.04 Laurent Fabius has warned Jacques Chirac that unless he puts in place policies to safeguard against the weaknesses in the proposed European Constitution, he will campaign for a 'No' vote. He demands a new employment policy to prevent jobs going abroad, and that the President convince his EU counterparts on the following:

- Reforming the Stability and Growth Pact
- Increasing the EU budget for research, training and investment
- Tax harmonisation across the EU25
- Adopting a directive protecting public services

(*Euractiv*)

23.09.04 Lionel Jospin has finally announced his position on the Constitutional Treaty: he is in favour. In his view, although it is not ideal from a socialist perspective, it does nevertheless represent an acceptable compromise. France, as a founding member, should not provoke a 'European crisis' by rejecting it: the result would certainly be increased isolation. Such a 'crisis' would also leave the field open to the US, which would prefer a divided Europe. Nor should a vote on the Constitution be used as an opportunity to say no to Jacques Chirac and to the government. It should be a vote on whether or not to approve a treaty adopted by 25 member state governments. (*Nouvel Observateur*)

Germany

30.08.04 The leader of the SPD Franz Müntefering announced that in October or November a new bill would be proposed to amend the German constitution and make it possible for Germany to hold citizens initiative referenda and referenda put forward by the government. (*EUobserver*)

08.09.03 If the CDU agrees the proposed SPD reform of the German Basic Law to enable a referendum on the new European Constitution, it could take place early next year, according to a German government spokesman. The bill would need a two-thirds majority in both the Bundesrat and the Bundestag, for which the SPD needs the agreement of the CDU. The leader of the CDU's Bavarian sister party, the CSU Edmund Stoiber is already campaigning for a referendum, as is the liberal FDP and other key SPD and Green politicians. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer remains firmly against a referendum. (*FT*)

UK

06.09.04 Tony Blair would be best to keep away from the referendum campaign in the UK and to leave it to Gordon Brown, Chris Patten and Charles Kennedy, according to a report by the Foreign Policy Centre. Latest polls show the No Campaign to have 50% support.

Left of centre opposition to the Constitution is building up – a new think tank has been set up in the UK and has launched a campaign designed to rally opponents of the European Constitution on the left of the political spectrum. It is thought to have already forged links with groups in the Netherlands and Denmark, France and Sweden, with plans to link up with other groups in Germany, Spain and Italy. The Group is headed by a Green MEP (Caroline Lucas), a Labour MP (Ian Davidson) and the editor of the *Ecologist Magazine* (Zac Goldsmith). (*EUobserver*)

09.09.04 The British government has published a White Paper on the Treaty establishing a European Constitution, setting out the main elements of the new Treaty and analysing how the government delivered on the negotiating objectives set out in the White Paper of September 2003. According to Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, the IGC modifies the Convention text in 80 areas. 39 of these amendments were advocated by the UK; on 38 other areas the UK was neutral to amendments proposed by others; and on the remaining 3 issues the UK secured changes at the European Council, which made the proposed amendments acceptable. (*Jack Straw, Speech to House of Commons, www.fco.co.uk*)

The Conservative Party Shadow Foreign Secretary Michael Ancram has announced that his party will establish informal links with the UK Independence Party for the purpose of campaigning against the European Constitution. (*EUobserver*)

20.09.04 UK Commissioner Chris Patten has joined the board of *Britain in Europe*, the cross-party lobby group that will run the 'Yes' campaign for the referendum in the UK on the Constitutional Treaty.

24.09.04 UK Commissioner Neil Kinnock has joined the board of *Britain in Europe*. It is thought that former foreign secretary Robin Cook will also play a prominent role. It marks a turning in the fate of *Britain in Europe*, which many believed to have become too close to 10 Downing Street. Many of those getting involved did not agree with Blair's decision to hold a referendum, but believe the consequences of a No vote to be so serious that they cannot stand back. (*Guardian*)

INTERESTING INITIATIVES

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY in 2005

This initiative was launched in September by a coalition of charities, trade unions, campaigning groups and celebrities and announces ambitious plans for next year to capitalize on a series of key events in 2005:

April	The Commission for Africa Report published
July	The UK hosts the G8
July	20 th anniversary of Live Aid
July – Dec	The UK holds the presidency of the EU
Sep	UN Millennium Development Goals Special Summit

For more information go to www.makepovertyhistory.org

European Social Forum, London, 15-17 October 2004

The European Social Forum will take place this year in London on 15-17 October at Alexandra Palace. Act4europe will be hosting a stall – so please come and visit us! (www.fse-esf.org)

European Commission information material on Constitution

The European Commission has published new information pamphlets on the Constitutional Treaty. The citizens' guide can be found at the following link:

http://europa.eu.int/futurum/documents/presentation_citizens_010704_en.pdf

There are also two power point presentations available at the following link: http://europa.eu.int/futurum/comm/documents/presentations_en.htm