

act4europe

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CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

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EDITORIAL - TIME TO ACT4EUROPE

Dear Friends

As quickly as it raced along the Convention was over. On Friday the 13th it finished officially with a plenary ceremony. Despite the rather poor result, it was a historic moment in some respects and some speeches reflected this tension of pro and contra fairly well. Today Giscard has presented the draft to the summit and news agents report the summit has accepted it as a basis for the IGC, but governments have a carte blanche to open any section of the draft they want. The IGC will start in October. Of all Austria and Luxembourg were the most critical (we rather expected Spain and the UK to take that role). Convention Members and the Secretariat have confirmed that the extension was granted. Deadline for Part III amendments is Monday 23rd lunchtime. The first plenary will be on the 4th of July and the second 9th and 10th July. We will be back watching them closely and will report to you. You will find more information on the Convention below. The IGC will start in

Our Civil Society assessment event "Time to act4europe!" was very successful with over 120 NGO participants from different sectors and 20 different European countries. It has given us renewed drive to continue with the act4europe campaign and many NGOs at EU and national level have joined us, which is

wonderful. There were a lot of questions put during the first two public panels and the internal strategy session in the afternoon was very well attended and lively. You can find all the relevant documents on the webpage now. Jean-Luc Dehaene has apparently praised our event at the summit today (rumours travel fast), and while it is surely in his interest to praise the civil society efforts he attends, it is nevertheless nice to know he had a good time too 😊. You find a more detailed report below.

Our webpage is up and running after weeks of work on it. Have a look under www.act4europe.org. We are still working on some technical aspects and we will certainly be updating it continuously. We hope this will be a useful tool for all of us.

Best wishes
Nico Beger
act4europe campaign coordinator

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

Time to act4europe! Civil Society's next steps after the Convention.

The Civil Society Contact Group and the act4europe campaign held a large public event on Tuesday 17th June to mark the final cross-sectoral NGO assessment of the draft Constitution, facilitate a public debate on the result and the way ahead during the IGC, and to bring NGOs from all across Europe together to discuss the act4europe strategy.

The event was attended by around 120 NGO representatives from EU NGO networks, Unions, and national level NGOs (diverse NGO sectors in 20 countries). There was a small press conference and European Voice will cover the event in their next edition. A first panel focused on the general cross-sectoral benchmarking document of the Civil Society Contact Group, which was presented by the current chair of the Contact Group, Mr. Dick Oosting. This was followed by the NGO sectors' assessment of the outcome of the convention. While a lot was achieved in the final weeks through a huge concerted lobby effort, the general assessment was that the result is overall unsatisfactory, since almost all our apparent victories related to preserving the *acquis* rather than actually improving on the existing situation for the people in Europe. There are only some aspects of real improvement, one of which is the introduction of participatory democracy, however weak it is formulated. The individual sectors' assessment documents and the bench-marking document were made available to participants and are now on the act4europe webpage. The benchmarking document was also sent to all Convention Members and - with a cover letter on the outcome of the event – to the Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis. There

was support from participants on the general line of assessment and some lively debate on specific NGO and national concerns.

The second public panel gave an opportunity to engage in questions and discussion with Jean-Luc Dehaene (Vice President of the Convention), John Monks (ETUC General Secretary), John Palmer (Director of the European Policy Centre), and Wojciech Ostrowski (Polish Embassy). Kirsty Hughes (Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies) stirred the session with ample opportunities to ask questions from the floor and facilitate some debate on the panel. Via the grape vine we have already heard that Jean-Luc Dehaene praised the event at the summit in Salonika as very important and well organised civil society response.

The afternoon focused on an internal meeting for NGOs with the Civil Society Contact Group and the act4europe campaign coordinator to explain the idea and past strategy of act4europe and discuss our joint ideas on a cross-European, cross-sectoral and forceful campaign around the IGC. Some of the following points were agreed (a full list is on the webpage), many of which have already been implemented during the convention phase and will be extended further:

- Expand the act4europe list
- Regular meetings with Italian and Irish Presidency at EU and national level
- National press campaigns with the help of neighbouring country NGOs and the Brussels office
- Mainstream the issue into existing civil society events at the national level, for example conferences, seminars etc.
- Campaign for access and transparency within the IGC (at EU and national level), including timetables, consultation, access to documents
- Use Convention members at national level - particularly Parliamentarians - to support demands. Ask national Parliaments to debate the progress of the IGC in public with their governments.
- Link the campaign to the European Parliament elections in 2004
- Organise regular meetings of civil society through act4europe to exchange information, and develop common strategies. Next meeting around October. Facilitate information exchange via act4europe around the information leaks that exist in different countries.
- Encourage the formation of national Contact Groups (examples Ireland, Estonia, Spain)
- Combine forces between trade unions and NGOs to increase lobbying power, and ability to increase media profile
- Offer training sessions for NGOs and union activists on the Future of Europe process / InterGovernmental Conference, to develop ability to influence process. Focus particularly on accession countries.
- Develop the website further and write a new toolkit on lobbying the IGC (in several languages)

CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

As the future is always more interesting than the past, here are the dates and technicalities of the next few weeks. The Council has obviously agreed to an extension on Part III until the 15th of July. Amendments for Part III are due by the 23rd June lunchtime and all amendments already tabled for Part III have to be re-tabled or they will not be regarded (which not all Convention Members are fully aware of it seems). The first plenary will be on the 4th of July, then the Prasesidium re-drafts the text, and the final debate is on the 9th and 10th of July. Part of those last two days will surely be spent in component groups and political families again. There has been no news on extending the mandate on Part III, so it remains to be seen how many changes will be considered for debate at all. Today Giscard has presented the draft to the summit and news agents report the summit has accepted it as a basis for the IGC, but governments have a carte blanche to open any section of the draft they want. The IGC will start in October. Of all Austria and Luxembourg were the most critical (we rather expected Spain and the UK to take that role).

The last days of the official Convention time were interesting to watch. There was little plenary time and a lot of meetings behind closed doors within the component groups and the political parties. The national parliamentarians and the MEPs struck up a joint position on the institutions and tried to force their final changes through with majority pressure, which was only successful in small parts. The mood in the plenary was very good during Wednesday, as particularly the parliamentarians were hoping to force some more changes through against some governments, with Britain and Spain taking the lead against those changes. The Thursday evening plenary then saw another eruption of substantial debate, since the draft that Giscard brought to the plenary at 7pm (and nobody had time to read before) watered down the Charter of Fundamental Rights by adding a sentence on the scope of interpretation to the pre-amble. The UK government representative was directly attacked with the suspicion that they are behind this change and Commissioner Vittorino was also not the hero of the evening. Many parliamentarians were fairly disappointed about the changes, particularly the restriction of qualified majority voting, the weak revision clause, the balance between Council and Commission, and the still existing limitation of the European Court of Justice and European Parliament co-decision. A clause was added that gives scope to pass legislation for citizens' initiatives, which was a great success. One Convention Member had the Social Europe action card stuck up as beside his nametag for cameras, which was nice to see for us.

After a final round of debate behind closed doors within the political families, the ceremonial final session started on Friday at 11 am and finished at 1:30 pm with a joint lunch. Despite of the poor result, it was a historic and a bit moving moment. All speakers accepted the deal struck, acknowledged the fact that after centuries of blood, war and anti-semitism, a European constitution is an achievement in itself, but many nevertheless still listed the decisive problems of

the end result. One representative from each component spoke, then one for each of the political families, and afterwards the debate was open for general speeches. Giscard promised to correct the translations, translate into all accession languages and make all translations gender neutral (!) before the summit. He was applauded for the latter.

There are only a few noteworthy aspects in the speeches. Palacio, the Spanish Foreign Minister, who represented the government group, announced Spain's resistance to the draft rather than speaking on behalf of the governments in the convention. She was contradicted by some government speeches later. Social aspects, gender parity, Euratom, and the lack of consequent democracy was mentioned again as problematic (besides some other points), and the efforts of Civil Society to guard the process were gratefully acknowledged by a few speakers. The funniest speakers were likely the Austrian Caspar Einem and the British Liberal Andrew Duff. The latter has been attacked heavily by British press this week for stating that Britain did not speak with one voice in the convention and that he hopes British people will shed their obsessive nationalism and make Britain a modern European Country. He, thus, rescued the honour of those many British people who have been active for rights and progress at the European level for years.