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1. EDITORIAL

Dear Act4europe friends,

Debate on several hot issues of the EU policy comes back on the agenda after the summer holiday. Consultation on the Green Paper on transparency, EU future Communication policy and the debate on the future of the Constitutional Treaty are some of this autumn's subjects of debate.

The consultation on the Green Paper on Transparency closed on 31 August. Among other organisations, the CSCG brought its contribution to this crucial debate, urging EU institutions to adopt a strong position and strengthen ethical rules for both lobbyists and themselves.

The EU future communication policy, especially its efficiency, weak points, proposals for improvement and available funding have been analysed recently by EU institutions, civil society and think tanks. Despite the divergences of opinions between different stakeholders, they all agree on the necessity of bringing the EU closer to its citizens and eliminating the existent communication gap.

As the "period of reflection" goes on, German leaders and several EU leaders have reopened the debate on the future of the Constitutional Treaty and a simplified version of it seems to win more supporters every day. In this issue we will try to keep you updated with the latest developments.

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2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP and ACT4EUROPE

Transparency initiative: CSCG calls for enhanced ethical rules for lobbyists

Who gets Community funding? What influence do lobbies have? What rules of conduct do those in charge of the European institutions have to follow? These questions have been at the heart of the debate on transparency since the discussion was re-launched by EU Commissioner Kallas in March 2005. Responding to the consultation on the Green Paper on transparency, the Civil Society Contact Group presented common positions on the three key dimensions covered by the Green Paper:

- **Transparency and interest representation**, where it calls for equal rules to be applied to all "lobbyists", while stressing their diversity and keeping an open door to less established organisations. In particular, the Contact Groups calls for enhanced ethical rules and reinforced information on the background of lobbyists.
- **Minimum Standards for Consultation**, in which it sets recommendation on how to improve the way EU institutions, and in particular the European Commission, consults with civil society
- **Transparency over the recipients of EU funds**, the CSCG calling for "full transparency" over the use of EU funds, as a way to strengthen citizens' trust in the EU.

All positions can be downloaded from the Civil Society Contact Group's website: http://act4europe.horus.be/code/EN/actions.asp?id_events=116. A number of CSCG members and members of their networks have responded to the consultation, amongst others the Green 10, Social Platform, EPAH, Greenpeace, Action Aid, CEDAG, NCVO... All their contributions can be found on: <http://ec.europa.eu/comm/eti/contributions.htm>.

How to improve participatory democracy in the EU? Civil Society Contact Group publishes study *Civil dialogue – making it work better*

NGOs play a growing role in shaping the EU project through, amongst others, participation in a 'civil dialogue' with the EU institutions. Yet there is little understanding of how to make this dialogue work more effectively. The Civil Society Contact Group thus decided to commission the study *Civil Dialogue - making it work better* in order to review existing practices and table recommendations to the current debates on EU citizenship. Based on an overview of dialogue with EU institutions and on case studies with a particular focus on national NGOs' involvement, it looks at the practise of civil dialogue, reviewing what works, and what doesn't.

We hope that the study – and the recommendations which we make for change – will be a useful contribution to the current debate and will help NGOs in achieving their aims. Soon you will be able to download the study on the following address: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/Civil%20dialogue,%20making%20it%20work%20better.pdf>

Communication White Paper: CSCG calls on EU institutions to strengthen dialogue with civil society

The European Commission's White Paper on Communication makes dialogue between citizens and public authorities one of its key priorities. Responding to the consultation on the White Paper, the CSCG called on EU institutions that dialogue with civil society is not about mere communication, but is about *participation* and should lead to concrete outcomes. It thus calls on the European Commission and other institutions to take further steps to engage in dialogue with civil society and make civil dialogue work better. The CSCG contribution (based on the study *Civil Dialogue, making it work better*) can be downloaded on: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/CSCG%20contribution%20Communication.pdf>.

Report from the conference 'NGOs and the EU: making civil dialogue work better'

Taking place in the context of harsh debates over transparency, communications and ways to better link citizens and the EU, the conference 'NGOs and the EU: making civil dialogue work better' brought together some 130 NGO activists in Brussels on 12 July 2006. It was a timely opportunity to debate these hot issues with some of their main actors (in particular Kristian Schmidt, Vice-Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Kallas), but also among NGOs, through more workshops organised around the Open Space Method. The conference was also an opportunity to discuss a draft version of the Study "Civil Dialogue, making it work better" that the CSCG will publish in October and improve its recommendations.

The conference report can be downloaded from the Contact Group's website: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/12.07.06%20conference%20report.pdf>

3. NEWS: participatory democracy

Transparency initiative: end of the consultation, but debate goes on

More than 15 months after the launch of the transparency initiative in March 2005, the consultation on the Green Paper came to an end on 31 August 2006. The ETI covers a wide range of issues, ranging from strengthened ethics-rules for EU policymakers and the estimated 15,000 lobbyists who seek to influence them in Brussels to funding issues. Among the most disputed points were: should there be a compulsory or voluntary registration system for lobbyists? Should equal rules be applied for all lobbyists and are NGOs lobbyists like the others? How improve the way EU institutions consult and up to where can transparency over EU funding be ensured?

The consultation received more than 48 contributions from NGOs (including from the CSCG and a number of its members), 73 from the private sector and 18 from the public sector which can be downloaded from: <http://ec.europa.eu/comm/eti/contributions.htm>.

However, the debate and controversies are far from being over, as the European Parliament's budget committee has just commissioned and own initiative report on the issue.

Uncertainties over the future of European Commission's communication strategy

On 28 August, in front of the European Parliament's Committee on Education and Culture, European Commission's Vice-President Margot Wallström briefed MEPs on the follow-up to the European Commission's communication strategy, while deploring the lack of means available. She presented a list of actions to be taken between this autumn and in 2007, including public actions, such as the "Springtime of Europe" to be renewed and new actions to be initiated such as the "50 Faces of Europe", on the occasion of the **50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, in March 2007**. The Commission will also take an interest in the creation of new meeting places where citizens may discuss the themes of interest to them and relations with the media will be looked at in greater detail. A final report further to consultation on the White Paper will be published in 2007 and several conferences are programmed for this autumn and winter, covering different themes based on priority subjects developed in the White Paper:

- 27 October 2006 in Madrid (public opinion analysis)
- **9-11 November 2006 in Bergamo, Italy (empowering citizens)**
- November or December 2006 in Helsinki (media)
- December 2006 in Brussels (common principles)
- January 2007 in Berlin (doing the job together)

You can find Margot Wallström's speech at:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/478&format=HTML&agued=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Reports highlight weaknesses of Commission's communication strategy

The Budget Committee of the European Parliament commissioned Brussels think-tank Centre for European Policy Studies to provide two studies on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility of the actions and programmes launched by the Commission over the years in the context of its information and communication strategy. The two CEPS report, which were presented to the Parliament's Budget Committee on 13 September, were based on 15 interviews with communication experts from different directorates-general. The overall message of the two reports is that communication and information campaigns and actions are reasonably effective but that more financial means as well as human resources, and more flexibility as regards spending, are needed.

You can find more details on the above-mentioned studies at:

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/governance/reports-highlight-weaknesses-commission-communication-strategy/article-157715>

Launch of pan-European citizens' consultation process

The weekend of 7-8 October will see Commission Vice President Margot Wallström launch the biggest-ever pan-European debate involving citizens from all 25 EU Member States to find out what they want from Europe and which issues matter to them most.

This "Agenda Setting Event" at the Expo Center (Heyzel) in Brussels marks the start of an unprecedented consultation exercise which will lead to simultaneous, parallel dialogues between citizens in every EU Member State. The results of this process, which will be presented to EU policy-makers in spring 2007, are aimed at inspiring policy-makers as they begin to chart a new course for Europe following the rejection of the EU's Constitutional Treaty in two referenda in 2005. Two hundred citizens from 25 countries, selected at random to represent the diversity of the population, will travel over 300,000 km to take part in this unique debate. Over the course of two days, they will craft a "European Citizens' Agenda", which will identify three key topics for discussion at national events. On Sunday afternoon,

this will be handed over to the project's national partners, who will use it as a basis for the subsequent National Consultation events in all 25 Member States in early 2007. (Source: *European Consultation process website*). You can find more information on: <http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/>

European Citizens' panels: "What roles for rural areas in tomorrow's Europe?"

The European Citizens' Panel is a pilot initiative that aims to collect citizens' opinions on a question of major importance for the European integration process: "What roles for rural areas in tomorrow's Europe?"

The global objective of the European Citizens' Panel is to encourage a bottom-up contribution from citizens to the discussion on the future of European policies affecting rural areas. The initiative aims to create a mechanism that will enable European citizens to draw up and disseminate proposals on the future of rural areas in Europe, based on comprehensive and unbiased information provided by decision-makers, experts and stakeholders. This will be achieved in two major steps : through the implementation of 9 panels at the regional level in 7 member states and two neighbouring countries (Romania and Switzerland), via the organisation of a panel at the European level in which citizens delegated by the regional panels will confront their views and define their common policy priorities. For more information, please see: <http://www.citizenspanel.org/>. (Source: *European Citizens' Panels' website*).

French Economic and Social Council calls for a more institutionalised civil dialogue

On 11 July, the French Economic and Social Council expressed its position to the European Commission's White Paper on Communication. Stressing that the evolutions proposed by the European Commission in the communication field are still modest, the report makes several proposals to improve information and communication between European citizens and the EU institutions and calls in particular for a more institutionalised dialogue between EU institutions and citizens. You can find the report at:

<http://lesrapports.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/BRP/064000632/0000.pdf>

4. "PERIOD OF REFLECTION" ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

European Parliament launches citizens' forums to discuss Europe

Following the French and Dutch no to the constitutional Treaty and in order to contribute to the "period of reflection" on the text's future, the European Parliament launched a series of "Citizens' Focus" around Europe, where MEPs meet the public face-to-face to discuss the issues that matter to the people. In September and October there will be 9 citizens' forums held around the European Union organised by the European Parliament's local Information Offices, in particular in the Czech Republic, Italy, Slovenia and Portugal. For more information, please see:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/002-10756-265-09-38-901-20060918STO10755-2006-22-09-2006/default_en.htm

UK Parliament's report asks Member States to abandon Constitutional Treaty

On 25 July, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the UK's House of Commons published the report "Developments in the European Union". The report looked at recent EU developments such as the UK's Presidency of the EU, the fate of the Constitutional Treaty, the issue of future enlargements and the EU's Foreign, Security and Defence Policy. On the EU Constitutional Treaty, the report recommends EU Member States "explicitly to abandon the Treaty as a package". It also considers that the UK government was wrong to retract its support for more transparency in the Council and should support the Finnish EU presidency to promote greater transparency. You can find the report here: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcaff.htm#reports>

Sarkozy and Prodi want simplified version of EU Constitutional Treaty

On 8 September 2006, speaking in Brussels to an audience of international press, NGOs, EU officials and business leaders at Friends of Europe, Nicolas Sarkozy, France's interior minister, and also candidate for the 2007 presidential elections, stirred up the debate upon the future of the EU Constitutional Treaty. His new propositions include a "Mini-Treaty", which would take up "about two-thirds" of novelties from the Constitution that were "not critical" issues during the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands. Sarkozy would like to see the text adopted during the German EU Presidency in 2007 and ratified during the French Presidency in 2008. In the same line, during an interview with French daily Le Monde on 13 September, Italy's Prime Minister Romano Prodi called for a slimmed-down version of the EU Constitutional Treaty, echoing Sarkozy's proposals for a "mini treaty". Prodi expressed his hopes that the political debate on the future of the EU could be re-launched on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on 25 March 2007. However, he added that "nothing can happen until the French elections" in May 2007.

Germany to make EU Constitutional Treaty a priority next year

On 4 September, speaking before a gathering of German diplomats, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's foreign minister said that reviving the EU Constitutional Treaty will be one of the priorities of his country's EU presidency next year. Steinmeier explained that the EU Constitutional Treaty is needed so that the EU can have a better representation in foreign policy and security issues. Meeting in June after a one-year period of reflection, member states avoided taking any concrete decisions and instead set out a timetable. Under this timetable, Germany will during its presidency present a report on the constitution based on "extensive consultations" with other member states. The report should contain an "assessment of the state of discussion" and "explore possible future developments." Afterwards EU leaders should examine the report using it as the basis for "further decisions."

Citizens paying the price of "non constitution", according to MEP Jo Leinen

On 19 September 2006, Jo Leinen, chair of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee, called on European Commission to produce a study detailing the costs of not having a constitution for the EU. Speaking to a Press Conference, he listed some key areas where the constitution could have helped citizens, for which the Nice Treaty has no sufficient provisions, which included help with natural disasters (such as the forest fires in Southern Europe), illegal migration, where the need for unanimity meant that Spain had no help with the refugees in the Canaries, but also energy and space policy. Mr. Leinen added "In May, Ms. Wallström told my Committee that she would commission that study. I have now heard that this has still not been approved by Mr. Barroso".

The report "The Cost of No Constitution", proposed by Jo Leinen, can be downloaded from the following link:

http://www.socialistgroup.org/gpes/media/documents/24995_24995_The%20costs%20of%20not%20having%20the%20Constitution%20ratified%20FINAL%20EN.pdf

5. NEWS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP MEMBERS

Members' latest newsletters

European Forum for the Arts and Heritage

<http://www.efah.org/index.php?id=14&pagelang=en>

European Public Health Alliance

<http://www.ephah.org/m/158>

European Women's Lobby

http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract.asp?DocID=1743&v1ID=&RevID=&namePage=&pageParent=&DocID_sousmenu=

CONCORD

<http://www.concordeurope.org/view.cfm?idref=PUB37&tab1=publications>

Transparency and NGO funding: CONCORD tells "the truth behind the figures"

This summer, CONCORD sent Wilfried Martens, EPP president, a letter referring to the community funds allocated to external aids. The official figures from the European Commission revealed that in 2004 of the 7.7 billion euros allocated to external aid, not even 5% was channelled through development NGOs. Recalling the recognized work of NGOs' support of civil society organizations in developing countries, as highlighted in CONCORD's publication - "The truth behind the figures", CONCORD asks for: more transparency in the official figures, a greater percentage of Community aid to be allocated to NGOs, a critical assessment of Community aid going to International Organizations, a more balanced distribution of funds between International Organizations and NGOs.

You can find CONCORD's report "The truth behind the figures" at www.concordeurope.org/download.cfm?media=pdfUK&id=1478.

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