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1. EDITORIAL

Dear Act4europe friends,

Changes in the Civil Society Contact Group - You have been waiting quite a while to finally receive a new edition of the Bulletin. Excuse us for that. Elodie Fazi coordinator of the Civil Society Contact Group for the last two years has taken up a new professional challenge already half time since November, while myself I started to take over from her at the end of November. So Elodie was and still is very busy with finalizing reports and sharing as much of her experience as possible with me while I am doing my best to get an overview of the issues we are all concerned with. I will though try to do my best to provide you regularly with information on the latest developments concerning participatory democracy in the EU. The Civil Society Contact Group wants to thank Elodie for her commitment and wish her all the best for the future!

Future of the Constitutional Treaty - As you can guess from the content table, the discussions around the future of the constitutional treaty intensified during the last weeks. It seems likely that civil society organisations will have a very hard time making their voice heard as the German presidency plans to directly talk with national governments even bypassing the EU institutions and proposed to held an Intergovernmental Conference already in the second half of 2007.

50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome - The Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) was signed by France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg on March 25, 1957. This signature can be seen as the first step towards European integration and what is today the European Union. The Civil Society Contact Group plans a few activities on that occasion and we therefore introduce a new section in the Bulletin.

We wish you all a lot of success in your undertakings for the year 2007!

Elodie Fazi
Leaving Coordinator

Regula Heggli
New Coordinator

2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP and ACT4EUROPE

Making your voice heard in the EU - A guide for NGOs in 8 languages

The Civil Society Contact Group is happy to announce the publication of the training handbook "Making your voice heard in the EU - A guide for NGOs". It is specifically designed for those "newcomer" NGOs and activists that are in the process of establishing a European strategy. It does so by providing tailored-made information on EU institutions, the way European NGOs work, as well as lobbying "tips", illustrated by examples of EU level campaigns. It does not aim at being comprehensive but rather at giving you a first insight in the EU labyrinth and how to find your way. To prepare the next stages of your strategy, it also provides more specific links and contacts depending on your area of activity. We hope you will find it useful. You can download it in English, French, German, Hungarian, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese and Slovene here: http://act4europe.horus.be/code/EN/actions.asp?id_events=120

New Chair for the Civil Society Contact Group

On October 24th, Ilona Kish was elected new chair of the Civil Society Contact Group for one year, taking over from Anne-Sophie Parent, President of the Social Platform. Ilona Kish is also the Secretary General of the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (EFAH) and has been a representative to the Civil Society Contact Group for several years. The Contact Group would like to thank Anne-Sophie for her commitment, and wish Ilona good luck for this new challenge. Her contact details can be found on: <http://www.efah.org/index.php?id=12&pagelang=en>.

Elodie Fazi leaving the Civil Society Contact Group

After two years of devoted work as the coordinator of the Civil Society Contact Group, in which she has contributed a lot to the visibility and the professionalism of the Civil Society Contact Group Elodie Fazi is leaving the Civil Society Contact Group. She has started to work with the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) as a policy officer. The Contact group would like to thank Elodie for the great work she has done during the last two years, and wish Regula Heggli, who has taken over the Civil Society Contact Group coordination good luck for her new position. You can contact her on the coordinator@act4europe.org email address from now on and reach her from Mondays to Thursdays at +32 2 511 17 11.

3. 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE TREATY OF ROME

The Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) was signed by France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg on March 25, 1957. This signature can be seen as the first step towards European integration and what is today the European Union. The European Commission plans a series of activities to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the treaty of Rome and announced that the Heads of States and Governments will at an informal Council Meeting on the 25th of March make a declaration (Berlin declaration) reaffirming common values. The Civil Society Contact Group decided to focus on the translation of these values into policies and will in this section of the Bulletin provide you with regular updates on the activities on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Winner of EU Logo Competition

Part of the EU's 50th birthday celebration, the new logo competition came to an end on 17th October with the selection of a logo showing the word "together" in letters of different fonts and colours, to be translated into the languages of each member state. The logo, drawn by a young Polish designer, will be used for the celebrations of the Rome Treaty next year and can be found on: <http://www.logo-competition.eu/>.

EU's 50th Anniversary: Celebrations to focus on Youth

On 24 October, European Institutions approved several projects and events to take place as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Rome Treaties in March 2007. The celebration should seek to "celebrate the freedom, peace and prosperity that the European Union has accomplished so far", and "looking at the future and at what kind of Europe the citizens (...) wish for the future". They will put a particular focus on youth, with a Youth Package which includes "United Schools of Europe", "Spring Day in Europe" and a Youth Summit in Rome (held parallel with the meeting between Heads of State and Government in Berlin on March 24-25th). Other activities will include: the "50 faces for Europe" project, a "mini film festival" or concerts for Europe. To what extent they will contribute to a real debate on the EU's achievements and bring new ideas to the period of reflection on the constitutional treaty is an open question. More information can be found on:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1472&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

A virtual Train for young Europeans

A film project and an interactive website supported by several European commissioners and MEPs was launched last week. The project is carried out by Royal Galilee Productions, a "group of young people living in Brussels, Belgium and working for the EU and multinational companies". Young people are invited to discuss European issues on board of a virtual train. During the next months a short film centred on a train journey crossing the EU will be shoot. The premier of this film will take place in March 2007 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. Have a look at <http://www.in-transit.org/site/>

4. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Summary Report on Mental Health Consultation

A report summarizing the contributions received during the consultation period on the Green Paper 'Improving the Mental Health of the Population: Towards a Strategy on Mental Health for the EU' was published this week by the European Commission. The report describes the distribution of contributions by type of respondent and by member state. It also highlights the important points raised in the consultation contributions. The summary report is an important contribution to the improvement of the transparency of consultations. You can find the report here: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/mentalHealthConsultationSummeray.pdf>

George Soros underlines the importance of coalitions of civil society organisations

George Soros, founder and chairman of the Open Society Institute, was speaking at this week's policy dialogue at the European Policy Centre in Brussels. He underlined that the EU could be a prototype for a global open society. He argued for the EU to shelve the debate on the Constitution and concentrate on building a stronger foreign policy and becoming an even more important player on global issues. Asked about the relevance of civil society participation he stressed the importance of coalitions across issues and sectors. The event report can be found on:

<http://www.theepc.be/en/er.asp?TYP=ER&LV=293&see=y&t=2&PG=ER/EN/detail&I=&AI=652>

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

Finland ratifies EU Constitutional Treaty

The Finnish parliament on 5th of December ratified the EU constitutional treaty with 125 votes in favour and 39 votes against. Finland is the 16th member state to ratify the text and the seventh country doing so after the rejections in France and the Netherlands. Since the start of the period of reflection in mid 2005 the Finnish presidency is the first to put the future of the constitutional treaty systematically on the agenda. You can find an article on the issues here: <http://euobserver.com/9/23028>

Germany avoiding the EU Institutions on the Constitution

Germany's ambassador to the EU, Wilhelm Schoenfelder, outlined at the beginning of this month at the European Policy Centre in Brussels, Germany's plans for the next 6 month on what concerns the constitutional treaty. He said, that Germany would try to avoid the council, the commission and the parliament and focus on negotiating directly with the national governments in order to meet the tight timing. As mid-2009 has been set as a deadline for ratification on a new treaty, Mr Schoenfelder said the member states needed to know by the end of 2007 what they are asked to ratify. This timeframe foresees an intergovernmental conference during the Portuguese presidency in the second half of 2007. All member states,

also the ones that ratified the current constitutional proposal, are likely to be asked to ratify the new proposal. The process is likely to be intransparent and closed for input from civil society organisations. You can find an article on the issue here: <http://euobserver.com/9/23039/?rk=1>

The cost of the Non-Constitution

The European Parliament had asked the Commission to draft a paper on the costs of not having a Constitution. A working paper has now been presented to the Parliament and published on the Commission's website. It outlines which advantages the constitutional Treaty could have brought in specific fields such as fundamental rights, freedom, security and justice as well as participative democracy. The paper can be found here: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/CostofNonConstitution.pdf>

Andrew Duff tables Plan B for the Constitution: which Role for Civil Society in Renegotiation?

As the debate on the fate of the constitutional treaty heats up, liberal UK MEP Andrew Duff (co-author of the EP's report on the reflection period) presented his Plan B on "how to rescue the European Constitution" on 18th October. Stressing two main dangers should be avoided, namely re-opening the text entirely or simply chopping some bits out of it, Duff wishes to see key parts of the treaty set in stone, namely part I and II, the charter of fundamental rights being given greater emphasis. However, part III should be the main area of re-negotiation, and Duff identifies five areas, which should be re-discussed to better answer citizens' concerns:

- Economic governance of the union (for which he suggests greater autonomy for the eurozone);
- Europe's social model (with the possibility of Member States signing a protocol on social Europe);
- Environment (through a "mainstreaming" of the fight against climate change into all EU policies);
- Enlargement (amongst others by including the Copenhagen criteria in the Treaty);
- Reform of the EU's finances (by including a review of the budget and the financial situation in the Treaty).

In terms of procedure, Duff suggests the text should be revised mainly by co-decision, being sent from inter-governmental conference to the European Parliament. The text can be found on: <http://www.notre-europe.eu/fr/axes/visions-deurope/travaux/publication/plan-b-comment-sauver-la-constitution-europeenne-1/index.html> (bottom of the page).

Joint parliamentary Meeting on the Future of Europe

The participants of the second meeting between national parliaments and the European Parliament on the Future of Europe held at the beginning of December affirmed the need to achieve a constitutional settlement before 2009. Most speakers agreed that a reform of the EU institutions was necessary and that considering that a majority of member states have ratified the text, its substance should be retained in any renegotiation. To read more about it click here: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-932-338-12-49-901-20061204IPR00923-04-12-2006-2006-true/default_en.htm. Find the website of the joint parliamentary meeting here: <http://www.futureofeuropa.europarl.europa.eu/>

Assessment of Plan D

On November 24 Margot Wallstroem, vice president of the European Commission, published an information note to the Commission assessing the activities related to Plan D that was to be discussed by the commissioners. The paper outlines and describes the activities that have taken place in the framework of Plan D and lists how they will be reinforced. One of the points proposes to "intensify the meetings between the Commission, its Representations and Civil Society NGOs". The paper lacks analysis of the outcomes of the described activities as well as the formulation of objectives for their continuation or reinforcement. The paper can be found here: <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/PlanDassessment.pdf>

6. 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/a/2438>

European Women's Lobby

http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract.asp?DocID=1820&v1ID=&RevID=&namePage=&pageParent=&DocID_sousmenu=

CONCORD

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

Social Platform

<http://www.socialplatform.org/module/FileLib/WeeklyMailing293.doc>

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