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## 1. EDITORIAL

Dear Act4europe friends,

**"Give us reasons to celebrate before 2057!"** is the claim heading the EU Civil Society Contact Group statement at the occasion of the EU's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The EU is celebrating 50 years of ever closer European cooperation. Representatives of the largest European networks of NGOs under the banner of the Civil Society Contact Group have worked hard to establish a common understanding of the agenda they like to see for the future of the EU. Several intensive discussions took place and a lot of negotiating was necessary. The willingness to come forward with a common vision and the commitment to contribute to the European project was though prevailing over sectorial interests. We are therefore happy to disseminate the Civil Society Contact Group statement and our animated e-card also through this Bulletin.

**The search for a settlement on the future of the constitutional treaty** is one of the German EU presidency's priorities. The German presidency sees the Berlin declaration to be made during the celebrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an important stepping-stone for creating a positive atmosphere for the renegotiation of a new treaty. Head of states and governments are expected to agree on a timetable for the renegotiation process during the European Council meeting in June.

**The European Transparency Initiative (ETI)** has been a prominent topic in our Bulletin a couple of times before. The Green Paper on Transparency launched in May 2006 was followed by a consultation period. On the March 21 2007 the Commission presented a follow up proposal. The Civil Society Contact Group is preparing an update briefing on the issue. Please keep checking our website.

Regula Heggli  
Coordinator

## 2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP and ACT4EUROPE

### **["Give us reasons to celebrate before 2057!" - EU Civil Society Contact Group Statement at the Occasion of the EU's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary](#)**

50 years ago on March the 25<sup>th</sup> the treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) was signed by France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. This was a first step towards what is today the EU. On that occasion representatives of the largest European networks of NGOs under the banner of the Civil Society Contact Group have worked hard to establish a common understanding. The result of these discussions is a statement that reflects what we believe to be widely shared concerns in civil society across Europe about the common and urgent challenges in Europe and the world. It proposes that, more than anything else, Europe must demonstrate its capacity to act effectively and coherently and to deliver on its promises. We are happy if you disseminate the statement to your contacts and use it to animate discussions within your organisations!

Click [here](#) to see our animated e-card and to read the Civil Society Contact Group statement. Please visit also our [members' websites](#) to learn about their activities and positions relating to the anniversary.

### **[Civil Society Contact Group meets Catherine Day, Secretary General of the European Commission](#)**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February Ilona Kish, and Regula Heggli, chair and coordinator of the Civil Society Contact Group, met Catherine Day, Secretary General of the European Commission

and two members of her staff, Jens Nymand Christensen (director on better regulation and institutional issues) and Gerard Legris (head of unit on Transparency, Relations with Stakeholders and External Organisations). The [Secretariat General](#) of the European Commission is among other things responsible for support to the Commission departments in their contacts with civil society and to ensure that EU laws apply correctly.

The aim of the meeting was to present and discuss the results of the study "[Civil Dialogue: making it work better](#)". Catherine Day said that there is a general wish in the Commission to engage more and better with civil society: "The need to do so has become part of the Commission's DNA". She raised two questions that are of great importance for the work of the Secretariat General:

- How to organize the contacts between the European Commission and civil society organizations?
- How to ensure the representativity of the organisations they engage with?

Asked why the Commission bothers at all to engage with NGOs, she pointed at the importance for the Commission to communicate with citizens. She said that she expects support by NGOs in "passing the message through to the citizen". Only after an intervention by Ilona Kish, she added that of course this was only one side of the coin and that NGOs bring a lot of expertise into the policy-making process.

### **Barroso and Wallström meeting Civil Society Representatives**

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy invited Civil Society Representatives to meet with herself and Commission President Barroso on the 23d of January to discuss the declaration to be made by the heads of states and governments of the EU and the EU institutions on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signature of the treaty of Rome.

In her introductory statement the Vice-president underlined the four principles followed in the drafting of the text, on which the German presidency has the lead. The declaration shall be:

- *Accessible*: short and readable
- *Forward-looking*: what is it we want to achieve?
- *Outlining aspirations*
- *Creating an atmosphere of consensus*: making a constitutional settlement possible

President Barroso emphasised the objective of the declaration being the mobilisation of public support for the EU. He shortly outlined the priorities he sees the declaration should address: Solidarity, Sustainability, Accountability, Security and the promotion of these values in the world.

Ilona Kish, chair of the CSCG, outlined in her statement the position of the CSCG. She welcomed Barroso's proposal for the declaration underlining the importance of the implementation meeting the high expectations the declaration would create. Kish also said that a coherent vision of the broad agenda was needed urgently. Other members of the Civil Society Contact Group supported this statement and added various points:

- the need for concrete commitments
- the importance of evaluation
- the need for the budget to reflect the agenda
- the need for coherence within and between policies
- the need for member states to overcome the national reflex
- the need to avoid EU-speak

The concern was raised that the foreseen drafting process excluded civil society and it was proposed to publish the declaration before the 25<sup>th</sup> of March opening a broad debate on the proposed agenda or using the 25<sup>th</sup> of March to launch this debate based on the declaration. Vice-President Wallström though made clear that the declaration was not going to be published and is very unlikely to be opened for discussion.

## New navigation and design for act4europe website

We are happy to announce that the Civil Society Contact Group website ([www.act4europe.org](http://www.act4europe.org)) will very soon be online with a new navigation bar and an refreshed design. We hope that these changes will make it easier for you to find the information you are looking for.

## Success of “Making your voice heard in the EU - A guide for NGOs in 8 languages”

We are very happy that the publication announced in the December Bulletin of the training handbook “Making your voice heard in the EU - A guide for NGOs” has generated a lot of interest. The download is now available in all produced languages (English, French, German, Hungarian, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese and Slovene). It has up to now been downloaded over 4000 times in the different language versions. The handbook 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.

We are looking at translating the handbook into other languages. We will keep you informed on that.

You can download the handbook in English, French, German, Hungarian, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese and Slovene [here](#).

## 3. 50<sup>th</sup> 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. There are plenty of activities planned to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty of Rome and the Heads of States and Governments will make a solemn declaration (called the Berlin declaration) on next Sunday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of March in Berlin. Find the official website at <http://europa.eu/50>.

### The EU’s past and future in the Berlin declaration

During a dinner on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March German chancellor and EU Council president Angela Merkel presented to the EU heads of states and governments gathering for the spring summit the plans for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary declaration, which is being drafted by the German presidency. The declaration is going to take the form of a short paper of two to three pages including five paragraphs. The five paragraphs are going to talk about:

- *History*: referring to achievements
- *Values*: putting in the center human dignity
- *Particular characteristics*: such as equality of member states, subsidiarity, transparency
- *Challenges for the future*: including fight against climate change, foreign and security policy, internal security, civil liberties and social responsibilities.
- *Commitments*: including probably a reference to taking meaningful steps in the reform process before 2009.

Neither the terms “constitution” and “constitutional” nor a timetable for the renegotiation process on the Constitution are going to be included in the Berlin declaration. The discussion among EU leaders showed broad endorsement of the proposed structure.

Addressing the European Parliament, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Foreign Minister, said on March 14, that the social dimension of the EU should be highlighted in the Berlin declaration.

The Czech government, who will hold the EU presidency in the first half of 2009, is refusing to include any deadlines referring to a new treaty. Czech prime minister Mirek Topolánek stressed at the beginning of this month that quality of a new treaty should have priority over a timetable.

To read more about the discussions concerning the Berlin declaration read the following articles: <http://euobserver.com/9/23706/?rk=1> and <http://www.euractiv.com/en/constitution/presidency-stresses-social-face-berlin-declaration/article-162480>

### **European Trade Union Confederation Memorandum for the German Presidency**

The Secretary General of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), observer member to the CSCG, handed over a memorandum to the German presidency at the end of February. The paper includes ETUC's position on the European constitution as well as on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty of Rome. ETUC opposes all forms of downsizing and renaming the Constitution. It favours the addition of a social protocol to the Constitution. ETUC expects the Berlin declaration to be forward-looking and to "include a clear engagement to defend and promote the European Social Model and to further develop Social Europe as part of the European answer and contribution to the current globalisation process".

Find the ETUC presidency memorandum [here](#).

### **"Europe's true stories"**

Timothy Garton Ash, professor of European studies at Oxford University, with a couple of students initialised an online debate to stimulate a debate around his proposal for Europe in its 50<sup>th</sup> year. He invited everyone "to join the debate about where Europe has come from and where it should be heading to. He is convinced that "Europeans badly need a new story that we can tell in our different languages and idioms".

You can read his thoughts and contribute on <http://www.europeanstory.net>

## **4. FUTURE OF EUROPE**

### **Constitution no longer a Constitution**

The German EU presidency in January sent an indicative timetable for the negotiation on the future of the constitutional treaty to the European Parliament. The letter also confirmed, that Berlin has asked the governments of the member states to appoint a focal point (or sherpa) responsible for the negotiations both on the EU constitution but also on the declaration for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This demonstrates as how closely interlinked these two processes are seen by the German presidency.

During the European spring summit at the beginning of this March German chancellor Merkel reaffirmed the German Presidency's timetable, which aims at setting up an intergovernmental conference (IGC) at the June summit. The IGC would then negotiate changes to the Constitution and the new treaty could be signed at the December summit. During the following 12-14 months the text would be ratified in the members states and could come into force before the European Parliament elections in June 2009. Merkel also said that the label "Constitution" would be dropped, "in order to avoid further referenda."

Czech prime minister Mirek Topolánek stressed at the beginning of this month that quality of a new treaty should have priority over a timetable. The Czech government, who will hold the EU presidency in the first half of 2009, is refusing to include any deadlines referring to a new treaty.

Read an article about the future of the term "constitution" [here](#).

A list of known Sherpa names is available on Jan Seifert's (president of YEF) [blog](#).

### **Dutch open to revised EU constitution**

A poll published in January shows that Dutch voters are increasingly open to the idea of a revised version of the EU constitution. They would though still reject the current text. The poll shows that the rejection of the EU constitution in the Netherlands does not mean that the Dutch are against the general idea of a European constitution. 47 percent said they are "positive" about the German initiative to "revive the a [new] European treaty", 17 percent said they are "negative" while 36 percent declare themselves "neutral" towards the German initiative. Still the results are not interpreted as good news for the German presidency, which wants to stick to the current text. If the text remains unchanged 60 percent of the Dutch would again reject the adoption in case of a referendum.

The new Dutch government coalition agreed to transfer the decision on whether to hold a second referendum on a revised treaty to the highest constitutional advisory body, the council of state. The council of state will only give his advice once the changes to the current text have been agreed. European commission president Barroso said that referenda only complicate ratification.

Dutch foreign affairs minister Maxime Verhagen and European affairs minister Frans Timmermans laid out the Dutch positions towards a new EU treaty in a letter to the parliament (on March 19<sup>th</sup>). They propose to elaborate a shorter, technical treaty and to drop the term "constitution". The letter also suggests improving the democratic control, giving national parliament a greater say and limiting the EU competences. They see the added value of EU policies mostly in the domains of energy, climate, migration and the fight against cross border crime and terrorism.

### **European Parliament and the reform of the EU institutions**

The European Parliament's Conference of Presidents (leaders of each of the political groups) unanimously agreed on a mandate for a special working group on parliamentary reform. At the meeting, Parliament's President Hans-Gert Poettering presented to the group leaders his own reform proposals, which formed the basis of the decision.

On proposal of Mr Poettering, Dagmar Roth-Behrendt (member of the European parliament) will chair the Working Group. It will concentrate principally on the work of the committees and the plenary sessions. In particular, there is a need to improve their efficiency and the public perception. Connected to this is the question of how to guarantee multilingualism as well as the responsibility of the Commission and Council towards Parliament. (socialplatform weekly mailing 301)

Find the news on the [EP homepage](#).

### **Future EU Budget**

The European Parliament's budget committee has suggested introducing an own-resource system to replace national contributions after 2013. The own-initiative report will be put to a plenary vote later this month. It proposes to introduce a system in which "a certain percentage of an existing national tax would feed directly into the EU budget" (euractive). The fiscal sovereignty would thus remain with the member states.

In an interview with Euobserver, the Lithuanian commissioner for budget, Dalia Grybauskaite, said at the beginning of this month that they are planning to launch a public debate on the EU budget in mid-2007. She also said that it was to early for an EU tax.

Find an article on the proposal by the European Parliament's budget committee [here](#).

Click [here](#) the article based on the interview with Dalia Grybauskaite.

### **European Parliament elections 2009 on the air**

European public broadcasters decided during a meeting last week to better prepare the coverage of the European parliamentary elections in June 2009 than it was the case in 2004.

The next European elections will be held over several days from 11 to 13 June 2009. The broadcasters are planning to make the election night on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June an exciting televised event.

The CSCG will discuss how to engage in the run-up to the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT elections 2009 in autumn this year.

## 5. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

### Follow-up of the Green Paper on Transparency

On Wednesday, March the 21<sup>st</sup>, the European Commission published a communication presenting the Follow-up of the Green Paper on Transparency on which a public consultation took place from May to August 2006. Interesting to note is the shift in terminology from lobbying to interest representation (explained on page 3 of the communication). The main proposals contained in the document are the following:

- *Voluntary register for interest representatives:* The Commission will in spring 2008 set up a voluntary register for interest representatives including a function for automatic alert on chosen topics
- *Reinforced application of the minimum standards for consultation:* through staff training, information sharing between the Directorates-General, a review of the practical guidelines for stakeholder consultation and the creation of a standard consultation template the application of the minimum standards shall be improved
- *Development of a code of conduct for interest representatives:* The Commission will review and update the existing minimum requirements adopted in 1992. The will invite stakeholders before summer 2007 to discuss the content of this revision.
- *Improve the publication of the beneficiaries of EU funds:* The Commission will set up a central web-portal that links to the relevant national websites. The Commission will also propose, in autumn of this year, common standards for the publication of these data to increase the comparability.

ALTER-EU (The alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation) welcomes the communication but criticizes the Commission approach as being too weak and lacking to address necessary internal improvements. The particularly criticizes the registration being voluntary and the lack of credible sanctions in the case of non-respect of the code of conduct.

Find the communication [here](#).

Read the [ALTER-EU press release](#).

Find the Civil Society Contact Group briefing on the Green Paper on Transparency dating from last May [here](#).

There are the following other aspects of transparency currently being discussed:

After the Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) had raised concerns on possible conflicts of interest of the special advisers in a letter to commissioner for administrative affairs, audit and anti-fraud, he has taken action. Kallas sent a letter to all 55 special advisers in January this year, asking them to confirm that there was no conflict of interest between their different capacities. The Commission has now committed to publish the names of the special advisers.

Following an article by euobserver, the European Commission is looking at how to overhaul its rules on public access to EU documents in the preparation for a public discussion on the issue to be launched later this spring. The statistics and the experience of the EU ombudsman show that a high proportion of requests for information are refused.

The Commission is therefore currently looking at four points in particular:

- the *moment* when a working paper becomes an official document
- *professional secrecy*
- ways to refuse *unreasonable requests*

- *time limits* for the refusal of a request

Read an article about critical NGO reactions to the announced register for lobbyists [here](#).  
Find an article on the disclosure of special adviser's name [here](#).

### **European Parliament citizen's agora 2007 and beyond**

Gérard Onesta's (Vice President of the European Parliament) idea of organising large public debates on themes, which are particularly relevant to European citizens and closely connected to the EU agenda in the European Parliament, is assuming shape. The themes were selected at the end of December by the conference of Presidents of political groups in the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT and include:

- climatic change
- the new generation and its vision of Europe
- the social dimension of the European construction

Two sessions are planned for 2007 which is set us a trail period. The Civil Society Contact Group sent a letter of support for the initiative to Gérard Onesta underlining that we would welcome cooperation for the selection of the themes for the Agora 2008 to start much earlier than that was the case for 2007.

### **European citizenship petition by ECAS**

ECAS, the European Citizen Action Service, in a petition asks the European parliament "to take an initiative to develop a real European citizenship". ECAS sees a "genuine European civil society" "as a practical expression of citizenship".

Find the petition [here](#).

### **The new "Europe for Citizens" programme**

The new cycle of the "Europe for citizens" programme runs from 2007 to 2013. It aims at promoting active European citizenship, through four different actions:

- Action 1 – Active Citizens for Europe  
This action is directed specifically at activities involving citizens such as projects developed in the context of town twinning and other citizens' projects
- Action 2 – Active Civil Society in Europe  
This action is directed at civil society organizations and think tanks, which will receive either structural support on the basis of their work programme or support to transnational projects
- Action 3 – Together for Europe  
The Commission will undertake several actions aimed at deepening the concept of 'active European citizenship' and at promoting its understanding all over Europe.
- Action 4 – Active European Remembrance  
This action aims at preserving the main sites and archives associated with deportations and at commemorating the victims of Nazism and Stalinism, as a means of moving beyond the past and building the future

*How can I apply?*

Concrete information on how and when to apply for a grant is published in the "Europe for Citizens Programme Guide" available [online](#).

## **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.epha.org/a/2544>

European Women's Lobby  
[http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract.asp?DocID=1888&v1ID=&RevID=&namePage=&pageParent=&DocID\\_sousmenu=](http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract.asp?DocID=1888&v1ID=&RevID=&namePage=&pageParent=&DocID_sousmenu=)

CONCORD  
<http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=1186>

Socialplatform  
<http://www.socialplatform.org/News.asp?DocID=8089&wich=this>



### **HEAL capacity building workshop on NGO advocacy on environment and health at EU level**

The Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL), member of the Green 10, one of Civil Society Contact Group members, hosted a capacity building and training workshop on “NGO advocacy on environment and health at EU level”. The workshop took place in Brussels on 27-28 February 2007 and was targeted at Polish and Hungarian NGOs actively working on environment and health issues at national or EU level. The workshop programme ranged from presentations on the EU policy set-up, to practical advocacy and media training as well as visiting the European Parliament to meet with national Members of the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. The workshop aimed to give NGOs from Poland and Hungary an overview of the EU’s role and functioning on environment and health policies. The training increased the capacity of the organizations to participate in EU environment and health policy-making. HEAL received feedback on the NGO environment and health priorities in Poland and Hungary and all organizations laid the ground for partnership building to explore ways of possible future cooperation. HEAL has used the handbook “Making your voice heard in the EU: a guide for NGOs” developed by the Civil Society Contact Group in the workshop.

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