

BULLETIN 47

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1. EDITORIAL

Dear act4europe friends,

The recently adopted Berlin declaration failed to outline a vision for the next 50 years of the European Union. The declaration lacks a clear strategy to tackle the challenges faced by the Union and it was not successful in engaging European citizens in the future of Europe. Furthermore it did not contribute to creating trust in processes taking place behind closed doors. Confidentiality and restricted negotiations didn't help to achieve a good text.

During the renegotiations of the constitutional treaty we want this to be different. A coherent and effective strategy of involving civil society is urgently needed to accompany whatever process and roadmap will be agreed at the June summit. The Civil Society Contact Group (CSCG) is working on a call for an open process that allows citizens to have a say during the renegotiation period. Only if mechanisms to structure the input from civil society are put in place, will they be able to effectively defend the achievements of the constitution and to push for improvements.

The credibility of the European Transparency Initiative (ETI) also depends on the quality of civil society involvement during the renegotiation of the constitutional treaty. The CSCG has just published a briefing on the follow-up communication to the consultation on the green paper on the ETI. The Commission has also published a green paper on the access to documents, which form part of the ETI. We hope the information included in this Bulletin as well as the briefing help you to follow and input in the debate.

Regula Heggli
Coordinator

2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

Publication of a briefing on the follow-up of the green paper 'European Transparency Initiative'

On Wednesday, March the 21st, 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 (see Bulletin 46). The Civil Society Contact Group just published a [briefing](#) on the follow-up communication and is also preparing an input following in particular the proposed register for interest representatives.

After an introductory part the second chapter of the briefing outlines the four main proposals in the green paper. In chapter 3 we present some reactions to the paper before summarizing the next steps (in chapter 4) and informing on the key contacts (in chapter 5).

3. 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE TREATY OF ROME

Berlin declaration: "We, the citizens of the European Union, have united for the better"

The [Berlin declaration](#) was signed by the presidents of the EU three main institutions (European Parliament, European Council, European Commission) and adopted by the heads of states of all 27 EU member states on Sunday the 25th of March in Berlin. An introduction referring to the achievements of the EU in the last 50th years and introducing "the citizens of the European Union" as the subject of the declaration, is followed by three paragraphs:

- The first section states the human being ("individual") as the centre of the EU project and lists as *key values and objectives* of the union: human dignity, rights an equal right for women and men, peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, security, tolerance, participation, justice and solidarity.
- The second part outlining *major challenges* includes economic success and social responsibility, the fight against terrorism, organized crime and illegal immigration, peaceful resolution of conflicts as well as energy policy and climate protection
- The third and last section points out the *will for openness and internal development*. It underlines the importance of "placing the European Union on a renewed common basis before the European Parliament elections in 2009".

The declaration lists a few of the values and challenges the CSCG has also addressed in its statement on the 50th anniversary. However it falls clearly short of developing a vision for the EU.

The Social Platform, member of the CSCG, reacted with disappointment to the Berlin declaration. "The declaration not only lacks a clear common strategy to tackle the challenges faced by the Union, but fails to spell out a social dimension that would engage European citizens in the future of Europe" the [press release](#) reads. "More openness and involvement of civil society would definitely have helped to raise the general level of ambitions for this declaration by helping to put pressure on reluctant Member States," comments Anne-Sophie Parent, the Social Platform's president.

The European Policy Centre (EPC) in a [comment](#) criticizes likewise that "the most crucial question of all - how to engage the public in the debate over Europe's future and gain their support for whatever agreement emerges from that process - remains unanswered. "

Find the Civil Society Contact Group [animation and statement](#) (in French and English) on the occasion of the 50th anniversary on our website.

European Youth summit in Rome adopts its own declaration

200 young Europeans meet on the weekend of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in the capital of Italy to debate and adopt a [declaration](#) for the future of the EU. The meeting (organized in cooperation between the European Commission and the European Youth Forum) was preceded by debates on local, regional and national level. The Rome Youth Declaration includes six sections:

- *The future of the constitutional treaty*: calls for dropping part III and for an EU-wide referendum on the document
- *Sustainable development*: calls for an enhanced sustainable development strategy respecting the Kyoto Protocol and the Millennium Development Goals including a strategy to develop public transport and zero emission vehicles
- *Youth and education in the EU*: asks the EU to ensure access to education, the recognition of non-formal education and the inclusion of European history and politics in national curricula
- *The EU's role in a globalised world*: underlines the importance of development and the respect of European values in external policies as well as youth organizations as partners
- *The social and economic model of the EU*: says that high social protection levels, wealth distribution measures and the provision of services of general interest are central to the European social model
- *Building democracy and civil society in Europe*: underlined the importance of youth participation in policy-development

4. FUTURE OF EUROPE

Bilateral negotiations on constitutional treaty versus wider public debate

The German Presidency's objective is to reach an agreement on the timetable and mechanisms for the renegotiation of the EU constitution before the June summit (21-22 June). German chancellor Angela Merkel reaffirmed her will to do so by holding confidential talks with one designated person per member state. Merkel wants the June summit to give a mandate to an intergovernmental conference (IGC) to renegotiate the constitutional treaty throughout the second half of 2007.

Speaking to members of the European Parliament at the end of March, Merkel invited the European Parliament to organize a public debate on the future of the constitutional treaty. Her statement was a reaction to criticism on her secretive approach. It is the first time Merkel proposed to open the debate on the future of the constitution to civil society. Reacting to this idea, Jo Leinen (chair of the European Parliament's committee on constitutional affairs) and Gérard Onesta (vice-president of the European Parliament and responsible for the [citizens' agora](#)) are now trying to find support within the European Parliament for a citizens' assembly (citizens' agora) to be organised by the European Parliament on the future of the constitution.

Voices calling for an EU-wide referendum on a new constitution/treaty are getting louder: the Union of European Federalists (UEF) and the Young European Federalists (JEF) launched a [campaign](#) for a consultative EU-wide referendum on the constitution.

Member States positions in the debate

The *Dutch government* rejects the idea of a constitution and wants a new treaty to focus on the shortcomings of the Nice treaty. It should address common challenges such as enlargement, climate change, energy security, and terrorism. Social policies such as housing and healthcare shall remain in the national competence. It is still open if a new treaty would be submitted to a referendum. The Dutch government reaffirmed that they will not go back to the voters with the same document as in June 2005.

Poland wants to reopen negotiations on several delicate points of the constitution. The Polish government's main concerns on the institutional reforms are the following:

- *The double majority voting system*: the voting system as foreseen in the Constitution is though considered a delicate deal and most EU leaders do not wish to reopen the discussion.
- *The division of competences between the EU and its member states*: The Polish government doesn't want the EU to have any competence on social security systems and education.

The parties in the *Czech government* coalition agreed on a common position for the upcoming negotiations on a new EU treaty. The Czech government wants the new treaty to avoid any "constitutional symbolism" such as the terms 'constitution' and 'EU foreign minister'. They want the treaty to include clearly establish conditions for further enlargement.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair is trying to set up an alliance of EU member states in favour of a simple amending treaty instead of a European constitution. His proposal up to now was met with approval by the governments of the Netherlands, Poland and the Czech Republic. These four member states also call for the Charter of Fundamental Rights not to be an integral part of the future treaty. Blair hopes that agreement on key elements of the future treaty will already be reached during the European Council in June.

Italian leader Romano Prodi said, that if the EU should opt for a minimalist treaty solution, stronger cooperation and deeper integration of a limited number of EU member states should be possible.

Taking the different proposals and concerns into account the German EU presidency has put forward 12 questions for the discussions with member state governments. They questions include points such as:

- Changing the name of the proposed EU foreign minister
- Dropping the EU's symbols (flag, hymn, logo)
- Including enlargement criteria
- Including a reference to the social dimension
- Including the possibilities for member states to opt in or out of future treaty provisions
- Replacing the full text of the Charter of Fundamental Rights by a short reference

Draft European Parliament report on the roadmap for the constitutional process

The European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) discussed the "[draft report on the roadmap for the Union's Constitutional Process](#)" on 2nd of May. Members of the European Parliament now have the possibility to amend the report. It supports the German Presidency in obtaining the definition of a roadmap and the convening of an Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) from the European Council in June. It asks for the European Parliament to be fully involved in the IGC. The importance of dialogue between national parliaments and their governments during the IGC is emphasized in the report. The European Parliament expresses its willingness to ensure contact with national parliaments, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee as well as civil society.

Future of the EU budget: 2008 and beyond

The Commission adopted the [Preliminary Draft Budget for 2008](#), which for the first time allocates more money to policies related to growth and employment than to the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The Preliminary Draft Budget is the first step in the budgetary procedure. The European Parliament and the Council will debate the proposal on the 13th of July.

The European Parliament as well as the Commission are looking at the reform of the EU budget. The Commission is expected to publish a review paper on all EU spending in July this year, a summary of the results from a consultation early next year and to present a budget review document to EU leaders by the beginning of 2009.

The EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT on March 29th adopted a [resolution](#) on "The future of the European Union's own resources". It outlines in a first part the "shortcomings of the current financing system" before proposing a two-step approach to the revision of the EU budget. The first phase of the reform aims at improving the system of national contributions by respecting the following principles:

- equality between Member States
- simplicity of presentation for elected representatives and citizens alike
- solidarity and equal dignity amongst Member States
- establishment of a political link between a reform of revenue and a review of expenditure as it is already correctly included in the Interinstitutional Agreement

In a second phase of the reform the European Parliament proposes the creation of a genuine system of own resources for the EU following a set of principles:

- Full respect for the principle of fiscal sovereignty of the Member States
- Fiscal neutrality
- No changes to the order of magnitude of the EU budget
- Progressive phasing-in of the new system
- Establishment of a clear political link between a reform of revenue and a reform of expenditure.

5. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Consultation on public access to documents

The Commission on the 18th of April published a [green paper](#) on public access to documents held by the institutions of the European Community. The green paper forms part of the European Transparency Initiative. It initiates the review of the regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 and opens a three-month [consultation](#) period lasting until the 15th of July 2007. The regulation 1049 organizes the implementation of the right to access documents as introduced by the treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. The green paper consists of two parts. The first looks at the application of the existing rules while the second outlines options for improving the rules. The paper identifies three issues for discussion:

- A more active dissemination policy: looking at the register of documents
- The integration of the rules on access to environmental information: ensure coherence with the Aarhus convention
- The balance between transparency and other rights such as individual data and privacy protection, protection of commercial interest or the decision-making process

Just one day after the European Commission published the green paper on the review of the access to documents legislation, a seminar organised by ECAS (European Citizens Action Service) in partnership with the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Statewatch in a European freedom of information act took place in Brussels.

Find the seminar report [here](#).

Find an ECAS research on the application of the current legislation [here](#).

Seminar on a civil society charter for the EU

On March 29 a seminar (organised by CEDAG) on a civil society charter for the EU (also known as a EU Concordat as proposed by NCVO, the national council for voluntary organisations in England) took place in Brussels. The charter would outline certain agreed behaviour, undertakings and principles for both sides, the EU institutions and civil society, helping to establish a relationship of mutual understanding and trust. Participants in the seminar mainly represented national organisations working in capacity building for NGOs or cross-sectorial NGO networks but also two Commission representatives.

Find the report of the seminar [here](#).

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.eph.org/a/2600>

European Women's Lobby

http://www.womenlobby.org/site/module_cate.asp?DocID=7&v1ID=&RevID=&namePage=&pageParent=&DocID_sousmenu=

CONCORD

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

Social Platform

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