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1. EDITORIAL

Dear act4europe friends,

The new treaty for the EU was agreed by the 27 EU heads of state and governments in December. During 2008 it is presented to the national parliaments or in the case of Ireland to the people, for ratification. During the preparations of this new treaty that started in the convention in 2002 the Civil Society Contact Group has called to open a debate on the future of the European project. The act4europe campaign aimed at engaging civil society organizations at the local and national level to take part in this debate. Instead of discussing a vision for the European Union, the negotiations at that time remained tough quite technical.

Now, in the context of the EU budget review, the European Commission *does* invite everyone to think about priorities for the European Union. A consultation is running until mid April where you can submit your vision for the future of the European Union.

The EU Civil Society Contact Group on January 24 2008 held a conference with over 90 participants that asked the following two questions:

- Which priorities for the EU and how to reflect them in the EU budget?
- How can NGOs work in solidarity to influence the future EU Budget?

The morning session made clear that to be successful in budget advocacy, NGOs need to allocate organisational resources to budget work in order to be able to follow all stages of the budgetary process. Building alliances with media, academia and politicians is inevitable. Furthermore the conference pointed at a few other aspects to take into account when working on the EU budget:

- It will be crucial to link the debate on the EU budget to the provision of the new EU treaty.
- It might be useful to use the technical terms of “public good” and “added value” to argue for a change in policies
- EU spending is just one instrument that needs to be combined with regulation, coordination and other financial sources (member states, private sector)
- Most difficult to convince that radical changes are necessary, are the member states (not the European Commission or the Parliament)

Although public budgets are complex, impact by NGOs on public budgets is possible. In the case of the European Union it will be important to link the budget review to the new treaty provisions. The EU Civil Society Contact Group is currently discussing a common submission and follow-up activities. We will keep you posted.

Regula Heggli
Coordinator

2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

Civil Society Contact Group conference “Building a value based EU budget for the future – What role for NGOs?” on January 24

Over 90 participants, mostly NGO representatives, attended the Civil Society Contact Group conference on Thursday 24 of January in Brussels on the EU budget review. The morning saw a training session attended by about 70 participants. Warren Krafchik, Director of the International Budget Project, an NGO that “works to enhance the effective participation of civil society organizations in public budgeting in developing and transition countries” made the case for citizens’ involvement by outlining:

- The value that civil society organizations can add to budget negotiations
- The types of budget work
- Possible changes in budgets
- The challenges for advocacy
- Successful strategies

Jan Seifert, assistant to Helga Trüpel, Green MEP and member of the budget committee, explained how the EU budget currently functions and what the issues at stake in the review are. He explained

- The annual budget
- The seven year financial framework
- The EU's own resources
- Examples of successful lobbying

More political discussions took place during the afternoon session. European Commission representative Vasco Cal (cabinet member of the cabinet of Commissioner Grybauskaitė, responsible for the EU budget review) urged the participants to use the opportunity to submit to the Commission their own ideas on the future priorities of the EU. He underlined that this stage was not about amounts but about the headings in the budget. It is crucial to link such a vision to the values as set out in the Lisbon treaty, insisted Roshan Di Puppò, director of the Social Platform. Finding the synergies between sectorial interests of NGOs and at the same time focusing on what the EU can do what member states can not do on their own is the challenges NGOs are confronted with.

The Civil Society Contact Group will further reflect how to support the participants of the conference in contributing to the consultation and following the review.

Find the [conference report](#) here.

Find here a [briefing](#) on the consultation.

Civil Society Contact Group aims at strengthening the code of conduct for interest representatives

The EU Civil Society Contact Group supports efforts to improve transparency in interest representation towards the EU institutions. The proposed code of conduct for interest representatives however is weak and unlikely to improve the current situation. In the hope that the Commission will improve on the draft code, the Civil Society Contact Group has put together in its contribution to the consultation a series of remarks on the proposed code and the framework in which it is presented:

- the following elements should be addressed in the code: conflicts of interest, improper influence, misrepresentation, financial inducements, employment of former EU officials
- an *independent monitoring body* to deal with complaints, including for citizens and public interest organizations, with the ability to start own initiative investigations should be set up
- EU officials who witness that interest representatives are breaching the code, should have a formal *duty to report such breaches*

Furthermore

- the *wording* of the code should also reflect the realities of public interest groups
- the code should also *apply to individual lobbyists* in order to enhance a sense of personal responsibility and integrity
- all interest representatives who wish to be included in the register and lobby the EU institutions should sign on to the *same* code
- submission of inaccurate information and *breaches* of the code should be *publicly announced*

- the code should be drafted so that it could function, at a later stage, as a *single code of conduct for all institutions* especially for the European Commission and the European Parliament

Find here the Civil Society Contact Group [contribution](#).

Find here the [draft code of conduct](#) and all consultation submissions.

First regular meeting of the Civil Society Contact Group in 2008

The Civil Society Contact Group met on January 29th for its first regular meeting in 2008. The most important decisions taken are the following:

- The sectors will make their own contributions to the *EU budget review* consultation while aiming at having a common Civil Society Contact Group submission. The portfolio group on the EU budget review will propose ways to further work on the issue and how to follow up with the participants of the conference.
- To finalize the Civil Society Contact Group's contribution to the consultation on the code of conduct for interest representatives by including members amendments.
- Small groups will work on each portfolio before the next Civil Society Contact Group meeting. The portfolios are
 - 2009 European elections
 - Participatory Democracy and the roles of NGOs
 - EU budget review
 - Functioning of Civil Society Contact Group

The Civil Society Contact Group will update its constitutional treaty ratification toolkit in order to use it as a briefing on the Lisbon treaty.

You can find the [agenda](#) and [minutes](#) of the meeting here.

Civil Society Contact Group meeting CIVICUS, the world alliance for citizen participation

On Monday December 10th CONCORD hosted a meeting between CIVICUS and Brussels-based NGOs. The Civil Society Contact Group coordinator as well as several representatives of Civil Society Contact Group members (CONCORD, Social Platform, Amnesty International from HRDN) and a few other organisations participated in the meeting. CIVICUS, the world alliance for citizen participation is an international movement with over 500 members in more than 100 countries worldwide. CIVICUS' secretariat is based in Johannesburg, South Africa, and runs a number of programs very much related to the Civil Society Contact Group's work:

- *Civil Society Index*: uses an action-research methodology to assess the state of civil society in countries around the world. Several EU member states have been covered already. You find the country reports on <http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp>. A new call for partners in countries will be out in early 2008.
- *Civil Society Watch*: is monitoring the rights to associate and to express and aims at protecting space for civil society and citizen participation. Find more information on <http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp>
- *Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability*: works to enhance the legitimacy, transparency and accountability of civil society organizations and to build public trust in them by improving their governance. Find more information on <http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp>. This work is linked to the accountability charter for International NGOs developed by the workshop of international advocacy NGOs within CIVICUS. Find more information on the charter on <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/list-of-signatories.php>.

- *Strengthening Participatory Governance*: aims at enhancing the capacity of civil society actors to influence and participate in governance processes at the local and national levels. This program will be further developed in the future. It is one possibility for further cooperation between CIVICUS and the Civil Society Contact Group. Find further information on <http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp?c=00265D>
- *CIVICUS World Assembly*: brings together civil society representatives for the purpose of learning, networking and alliance building. The title the next assembly to be held in Glasgow on 18-21 June 2008 is "People, participation and power". Find more information on the assembly on <http://www.civicusassembly.org.uk/>

Go to the [CIVICUS homepage](#) for more information also about other programs.

3. FUTURE OF EUROPE

Signing and ratification of the Lisbon treaty

The new European treaty was signed by the heads of state and government on December 13 2007 in Lisbon. After the signing the treaty is throughout 2008 to be ratified in all 27 member states. The French parliament at the beginning of February approved the new EU treaty. With Romania, Hungary, Slovenia and Malta five member states have now ratified the text. The Danish Social Democrats have asked the government to analyse the effects of the Lisbon treaty on the collective bargaining rights before the ratification. The Danish government plans to ratify the treaty in parliament this spring. Ireland is the only country holding a referendum.

The European Parliament's constitutional affairs committee on January 23 voted on a report on the Lisbon treaty. The report

- outlines the improvements the treaty brings as seen by the European Parliament
- criticizes the opt out of the UK and Poland from the charter of fundamental rights
- deplores that the new text is less clear and readable than was the constitutional treaty
- urges national authorities to prepare short versions of the treaty as part of information campaigns ahead of the ratification

The Slovenian presidency in an internal document urges the European Commission and member states to start preparing the implementation of a list of treaty provisions one of them being the European citizen initiative.

Find here the [consolidated version](#) of the treaty in English.

Find the [EP report](#) here.

The Robert Schuman Foundation has published [10 fact sheets](#) about the provisions of the new treaty.

The European Policy Center (EPC) has prepared a [table on the context for ratification](#) in each member state.

Find a ratification map on http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/countries/index_en.htm

The European Policy Center's (EPC) issue 17 of "[Challenge Europe](#)" looks at the new treaty and the prospects for future integration". It is organized in three chapters:

- I on the "Key aspects of the new EU treaty"
- II on "the future of the EU integration process"
- III on "the people's project?"

In part III participative democracy, the role of the European Parliament and the European public sphere are being discussed.

Charter of Fundamental Rights officially proclaimed

On Wednesday December 12 2007, the three main European institutions, the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission during a ceremony in the European Parliament in Strasbourg signed the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Charter sets out the civil, political, economic and social rights of European citizens and all persons resident in the EU. The new treaty confers to the charter a legally binding character. The ceremony was disturbed by a protest of eurosceptic Parliamentarians.

Find the news on the [European Parliament website](#).

The Robert Schumann Foundation updates a [ratification map](#).

Lisbon Treaty could serve as framework for EU budget reform

According to press reports (Agence Europe), Dalia Grybauskaitė, the Commissioner for Budget, suggested on Tuesday 29 January 2008 that the Lisbon Treaty, once ratified, could serve as a framework for reform of the EU budget between 2008 and 2010 and in setting the new spending priorities. Speaking in front of MEPs, the Commissioner said that the Lisbon Treaty "suggests" five future broad political priorities for the EU budget:

- Security, freedom and justice
- Energy, environment and climate change
- Technological research and development
- Worldwide promotion of the values and interests of the European Union

The Commissioner also believes that the Lisbon Treaty innovations in terms of decision-making will "facilitate" the reform of the EU budget (strengthening the role of the European Parliament as co-legislator, direct involvement of national parliaments, removing the option for veto in more than 40 areas, increased stability through the nomination of a Council President every two and a half years, eliminating the distinction between obligatory and non-obligatory spending, etc.). (Social Platform Weekly Update)

Find here the Civil Society Contact Group [briefing](#) on the EU budget review consultation.

Find here a [policy brief](#) of the European Policy Centre on the EU budget reform.

Video competition to get referendums on the Lisbon Treaty

"The European Referendum Campaign (ERC) has launched a video competition to illustrate and deliver the following message: "you cannot build Europe without the consent of citizens!". Individuals and organisations are invited to submit their video until the 30 April 2008. The prize amounts to 1000 Euros. Videos can vary in terms of format and must focus on the contestant's feelings towards Europe.

The ERC was launched in September 2007 and will run until the European elections in 2009. The campaign's objectives are to get referendums on the 'Lisbon Treaty' in as many countries as possible. The ERC is hosted by Democracy International and comprises NGOs and individuals."

More on the competition on <http://www.erc2.org/138.0.html>

Reflection group on the future of Europe

French president Sarkozy's idea to have a reflection group (also: group of the wise) is taking form. Former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez will chair the group. The two vice-chairs will be Latvia's former president Vaira Vike-Freiberga and Nokias's chief Jorma Ollila. The three will choose the other members of the group during the second half of 2008. The timeframe was suggested by German chancellor Merkel in order to avoid interference with the ratification of the new treaty. The issues to be discussed are migration, fight against terrorism, social and economic challenges and climate change. The group will report on its findings in June 2010.

Find here an [article](#) on the issue.

Greater support for EU membership, less trust in EU institutions

The [new Eurobarometer](#) shows that EU citizen's trust in the European institutions dropped by 9% within the last 6 month. Trust in national institutions is tough even lower. At the same time support for EU membership has never been so high (58%).

4. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Register for interest representatives risks to be weak

On February 13 2008 "the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) has sent a letter to Commission President Barroso, expressing grave concerns over the development of the EU lobbying transparency register which is to be launched by the Commission this spring. In the letter, ALTER-EU warns that it will reconsider support for the European Transparency Initiative if the Commission would indeed backtrack from key promises it has made in the context of the European Transparency Initiative. In recent meetings with Commission staff, ALTER-EU has learned that in the current drafts for the lobbying transparency register, two crucial pieces of information are missing:

- 1) names of individual lobbyists and
- 2) meaningful information on how much money is spent on lobbying."

Unfortunately the press release and letter is not yet available online. Check www.alter-eu.org.

Study on ethical regulation in the EU

As part of the European Transparency Initiative a study on 'Regulating Conflicts of Interest for Holders of Public Office in the European Union' was published in December 2007. The study was carried out by the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht. The study looks at existing regulations in the EU member states and for the EU institutions and gives recommendations for both.

Find the [study](#) here.

Active European Citizenship Group - what is this new consultative group?

"DG Education and Culture has decided to structure the dialogue with NGOs participating in the Europe for Citizens program. In order to do so, they have initiated an Active European Citizenship Group, which met for the second time on Monday 04 February 2008. The group main goal is to address how to encourage the participation of European citizens in the EU project and activities? The objectives of the group are the following:

- create a network at EU level in the area of active citizenship;
- set up a place for regular exchange and debate between the European Commission and civil society organizations working in the area of active citizenship;
- provide a tool to take stock of experience, good practices and share results from participants' activities
- contribute to the preparation and implementation of the Europe for Citizens Annual Forum
- reinforce coherence and efficiency of all initiatives in this area

The agendas of the meetings are to be decided jointly by the European Commission and participants. The group will meet twice or three times a year. In the 4th of February meeting it was agreed that two focus groups will be created

- one to work on the notion of active citizenship itself, as it was felt that a clarification of the concept was necessary
- another one will work on the Annual Forum 2008, due to take place in November 2008"

"NGOs can help EU institutions do their job better" Ombudsman says

On January 24 2008 the European Ombudsman P. Nikiforos Diamandouros underlined the importance of NGOs in pointing out possible maladministration in the EU institutions. He referred to two recent complaints concerning the environmental policy of the European Investment Bank by two Polish NGOs and the question of revolving doors related to lobbying on REACH by Greenpeace.

Click here to read the Ombudsman's [press release](#).

The citizens' agenda - Plan D closing conference

After the majority of French and Dutch voters said 'No' to the constitutional treaty in 2005 the European Commission launched the Plan D program for democracy, dialogue and debate. Plan D supported six projects that explored different possibilities of involving citizens in European debates. On December 7-9 2007 participants of these projects met in Brussels for the closing conference of the program and to put their recommendations forward to the EU decision makers. The open letter includes 27 recommendations structured around three themes:

- The human aspects of globalization
- Enlargement, political integration and EU citizenship
- The EU's role on the world stage

Find the [open letter](#) here.

Find the [Commission website](#) on the closing conference of Plan D here.

CIVICUS call: How to build political will for participatory governance?

The goal of the CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation) Participatory Governance program is to build the capacity of civil society practitioners, as well as government counterparts, to promote citizen participation in public decision-making.

"CIVICUS is currently looking for examples of how implementers of Participatory Governance who have faced initial resistance on the part of state actors, or started from a situation of antagonism between citizens/civil society organisations and the state, were able to improve those relationships and build genuine political will for Participatory Governance approaches."

You are invited to share your ideas or examples with CIVICUS by writing to governance@civicus.org.

Find [further information](#) here.

Find further information on CIVICUS' participatory governance [program](#) here.

Taking the pulse of civil society worldwide – the CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society

CIVICUS is publishing the second volume of the CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society which provides a wide-ranging analysis of key issues facing civil society worldwide. The book draws on the information collected by the CIVICUS Civil Society Index project in more than 45 countries to explore issues such as:

- civil society's accountability
- civil society's relations to the state and corporate sector
- civil society's role in governance and development.

It also includes regional overviews of the state of civil society in different continents. By bringing together a diversity of perspectives and themes, this book offers one of the most comprehensive and engaging analyses of civil society worldwide.

Click [here](#) for more information.

5. NEWS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP MEMBERS

Members' latest news(letters)

[CONCORD](#)

[EUCIS-LLL](#)

[European Forum for the Arts and Heritage](#)

[European Public Health Alliance](#)

[European Women's Lobby](#)

[Green10](#)

[Social Platform](#)