

EU Civil Society Contact Group

BULLETIN 51

Brussels, April 2008

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1. EDITORIAL

Dear act4europe friends,

The Civil Society Contact Group is currently working on three main topics: The EU budget review, the European elections 2009 and participatory democracy.

At the beginning of April the Civil Society Contact Group submitted its contribution to the EU budget review consultation that consists of a set of principles (see section 2). The consultation period has been prolonged and will last until June 15 2008. There is plenty of time for those of you who still want to contribute, to do so. You are welcome to get inspiration from the Civil Society Contact Group principles.

The Civil Society Contact Group is currently developing its common activities around the European Parliament elections in June 2009. It is planned to produce a toolkit that explains the structure, functioning and powers of the European Parliament, the changes that the Lisbon Treaty is about to bring and giving ideas for local civil society organisation on how to engage in the European Parliament elections. You are invited to share any good practices you remember from the European elections 2004 (send an email with the description of the activity to coordinator@act4europe.org).

Relating to participatory democracy the Civil Society Contact Group is looking at three issues:

- the developments around the register and code of conduct for interest representatives that the European Commission is expected to present before summer (see section2)
- the implementation of the participation article in the new EU treaty (Article II 8-b) and
- access for civil society organisation to the sectorial Councils: we are preparing a document that outlines the experiences of different civil society sectors in working with the Council

All of you are also involved in activities aiming to make our societies more democratic and just. I wish us all lots of success for this endeavour ...

... and a nice spring time!

Regula Heggli
Coordinator

2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

Civil Society Contact Group concerned by U-turn on European Transparency Initiative urges Commission to stand by its commitment to build trust and credibility

Public interest organisations united in the EU Civil Society Contact Group at the end of March urged the Commission to apply high standards of transparency for a strong and meaningful register of interest representation in Brussels. "Alarming evidence that the EU is going for a U-turn on the European Transparency Initiative is worrying NGOs, which are reluctant to associate to a register that obscures more than it reveals," said Fintan Farrell, chair of the EU Civil Society Contact Group. In letters to Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Commission Vice-President Siim Kallas, Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström and Secretary General Catherine Day, the Civil Society Contact Group expressed its concern and said it would question the enlistment of its members on a register that hides the names of lobbyists and avoids giving precise information about the financing of lobbying activities. The Civil Society Contact Group is disappointed by the weak response of Siim Kallas, on behalf of the Commission. In his response, the Commissioner asserts that:

- The register will only comprise organisations and not individual lobbyists - contrary to what the Civil Society Contact Group asks for.
- He considers it “unnecessary and disproportionate” to add rules about conflicts of interest
- As regards the financial disclosure, the European Commission will request 'proportionate disclosure, representing real added-value to the information currently available', without defining the added value, not what proportionate means.

The Civil Society Contact Group members are currently focusing on coordinated actions to convince European Parliamentarians to vote on May 8th in favour of the report on the register as proposed by the Constitutional Affairs committee or event to strengthen it on the points outlined in the letter to Kallas.

Find the entire press release [here](#).

Find here the [letter](#) sent to Barroso.

Find an [article](#) on euractive that has taken up the Civil Society Contact Group position on.

Find the [response](#) from the Commission here.

Civil Society Contact Group contribution to the EU budget review consultation

The Civil Society Contact Group on April 3 submitted its contribution to the EU budget review consultation. The EU budget review goes far beyond discussing technical details of the EU budget. It aims at stimulating debates on the priorities of the European Union. The Civil Society Contact Group will discuss further activities on the EU budget review in its meeting next week.

The Civil Society Contact Group contribution consists of a list of fundamental principles that the EU budget needs to respect:

- The EU budget must respect and promote the values and rights as outlined in the Lisbon Treaty and contribute to achieving the Treaty aims and objectives
- EU money is public money and it must serve the European public interest
- EU funds must respect the principle of solidarity
- Sustainable development must be the overarching goal of a new EU budget
- Public budgeting and spending must be a transparent and accountable process
- The process of public budgeting needs to allow for meaningful participation from public interest organisations
- EU funds must be allocated in a way that reflects the EU's policy priorities and that supports coherence within and between policies
- There must be an immediate end to all perverse subsidies
- EU spending should be subject to regular evaluation

The consultation on the EU budget review was supposed to close on April 15th. However the consultation period has been prolonged until June 15th to allow more interested parties to contribute. So there is time for all those of you who haven't contributed yet, to still do so. You are welcome to use the Civil Society Contact Group contributions in the following ways:

If your organisation has an own contribution

- you can add the CSCG contribution as an annex to your organisations own contribution
- you can refer to it in your organisations own contribution
- you can include parts of it in your own contribution

If your organisation doesn't submit its own contribution

you are welcome to write a letter supporting the Civil Society Contact Group contribution.

The Civil Society Contact Group has also send a letter to Commissioner Grybauskaitė underlining the importance of a transparent and balanced process after the consultation and asking for the involvement of NGOs in the planned conference. The Commission plans to organise a conference on the results of the consultation. It was foreseen for May 27th but is likely to be moved to the second half of 2008. The next Commission document taking into account the consultation is expected for early 2009.

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

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

All contributions submitted until now are published on http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/issues/read_en.htm

[New page on the EU Budget Review online](#)

A new page on the EU budget review is [online](#) on the EU Civil Society Contact Group's website. Next to background information on the review in includes links to the Civil Society Contact Group's contribution to the ongoing consultation, a briefing on the consultation and the conference report "A value based EU budget for the future – What role for NGOs?".

[Launch of Croatian version of "Civil dialogue: making it work better"](#)

On 19 March 2008 the Croatian version of the Civil Society Contact Group's study 'civil dialogue: making it work better' was launched in Zagreb during a Civil Society Forum entitled: 'Civil dialogue in Croatia and Slovenia: exchange of experience and good practice'. On that occasion, Anne Hoel, Policy and Communication officer at the Social Platform gave a presentation on the Civil Society Contact Group, the study's results and how the Social Platform fits into this framework. Organised by the Croatian government and gathering around 100 civil society participants from Slovenia and Croatia, the conference aimed to allow for a cross-border discussion on how civil society can be involved effectively in national policy-making.

In a nutshell, discussions focused mainly on

- proper funding for NGOs (for advocacy purposes, as well as services delivery), as a basic requirement for participation;
- the need (or not) of a legal status and
- the need for stronger sectoral cooperation and networking.

Another strong message was the necessity for both parties (ie civil society and administrations) to better understand the requirements, obligations, work conditions of each other. Understanding and accepting the differences and commonalities could help to alleviate unrealistic expectations from both sides. Capacity-building for administrations and NGOs in how to make governance more participatory was felt to be crucial.

Find the [Croatian version](#) of the study here.

Find the [English version](#) here.

For more information, CSCG members can contact Anne at anne.hoel@socialplatform.org

3. FUTURE OF EUROPE

Ten Member States ratify of Lisbon treaty

In the meantime five more Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia) have ratified the Lisbon treaty. With France, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Slovenia nine Member States have now ratified the new treaty for the European Union. German chancellor Angela Merkel on state visit to Ireland – the only Member State to hold a referendum on the

new treaty - said that she believes the Lisbon treaty being the best preparation for Europe's future. A poll published this week, says that 60% of the Irish voters are undecided on how to vote. 65% said they had very little or no understanding of the treaty. The referendum in Ireland is expected to take place on June 12th. EU member states started discussing some of the most controversial provisions of the Lisbon treaty such as practical arrangements for the office for the new Council president and the design of the diplomatic service.

Read articles on [Austria's](#), [Bulgaria's](#), [Poland's](#), [Portugal's](#) and [Slovakia's](#) ratification. Find here a [ratification map](#) by the Robert Schumann Foundation. Read en [article](#) on member states' discussions of the new provisions.

Commission president legitimacy questionable if low turnout in European elections, says Barroso

The new treaty foresees the president of the Commission to be chosen in light of the results of the European elections i.e. the post goes to a person from the political group that wins the most seats on the European parliament. European Commission president Barroso said that the legitimacy of the Commission president will be questionable if the turn out of the European elections remains low.

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

"Budgeting for the Future, Building another Europe" – European economic policies form a civil society perspective

On Wednesday April 16th Sbilanciamoci! - an Italian NGO campaign with experience in working on the Italian budget (www.sbilanciamoci.org) – presented an analytical report "Budgeting for the Future, Building another Europe". The report puts forward a critical civil society outlook on the 2007/2013 Financial Perspectives and is organised in the Multiannual Financial Framework's headings. Several Civil Society Contact Group member members have contributed:

- Green10 members among other issue on the impact of structural funds on climate, sustainable development through regional funds, fisheries subsidies and on the Common Agriculture Policy
- Social Platform members on structural funds and the fight against poverty and allocation of EU funds in the area of Justice, Freedom and Security
- EPHA on public health spending
- CONCORD member Eurostep on Europe's global responsibility

You can download the [report](#) here.

50 anniversary of the European Parliament

On Wednesday March 19th the European Parliament celebrated the 50 years of its existence. In 1958, on March 19, the first constituent session of the European Parliamentary Assembly took place in Strasbourg. 142 members were representing 168 million citizens of the six founding states. At that time the assembly was not yet directly elected and had only a consultative status. The first elections were hold in 1979 when it also officially became the European Parliament. If the Lisbon treaty comes into force on January 1 2009, the European Parliament will from the elections in June 2009 on consist of 751 members representing almost 500 million citizens in the 27 member states. The Parliament's powers will once more be increased: the head of states and governments (in the Council) and the European Parliamentarians co-decide on nearly all legislative acts. The European elections in 2009 will be an important moment, also because the new treaty foresees that the strongest political group in the Parliament puts forward the president of the European Commission.

Find a special edition of Europolitics on the anniversary in [English](#) and [French](#) here.

4. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Lack of transparency main concern in complaints to the European Ombudsman

European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, in mid April presented his annual report for 2007 in Brussels. The main points of the presentation were the following:

- the Ombudsman received 3211 complaints from EU citizens, companies, NGOs and associations. In almost 70% of cases, the Ombudsman was able to help the complainant
- Lack of transparency remains to be the most regular type of maladministration
- Most complaints target the European Commission (64%), followed by the European Personnel Selection Office, the European Parliament, OLAF and the Council
- German citizens or organisations produced the greatest number of complaints (16%), followed by Spain (11%), France (8%) and Poland (7%). But relative to the size of their population, most complaints came from Luxembourg, Malta and Cyprus

The European Parliament at the end of April voted in favour of changing the European Ombudsman's statute and granting him access to more EU documents. It will no longer be possible to refuse disclosing information to the European Ombudsman on the ground of secrecy. The change in statute also needs to be approved by the Council. At the same time Parliamentarians decided against publishing the auditors' reports as a general rule.

The Ombudsman's [Executive Summary](#) and Statistics 2007 is available in all 23 official EU languages.

Find the Ombudsman's [press release](#).

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

Read an euobserver [article](#) and one by euractive [here](#) on the change in statute here.

European Commission advisory groups highly unbalanced

ALTER-EU, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the European Union, on March 25 published a report analysing the membership of a number of Commission expert groups. In a press-release ALTER-EU warns that the public interest is at risk as industry representatives have a disproportionate influence on a number of the Commission's most controversial expert groups. As a reaction the European Commission repeated the commitment made last year to publish within months the names of the members of these expert groups. On the same day Alexander Schaub, former head of the EU's competition and internal market divisions who is now working for an international law firm, in an article said referring to the Barroso Commission "There is tendency to consider its own popularity is linked to the environment and protection of consumers in a way that could be dangerous for business."

Find the [ALTER-EU report](#) and the ALTER-EU [press-release](#) here.

Find the [register of experts group](#) and the [register of comitology](#) of the European Commission here.

Read articles on the issue

by the [Financial Times](#)

by [euobserver](#)

by [euractive](#)

European Parliament report for obligatory register of interest representatives

The European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs on Tuesday, April 2, voted on the report drafted by Andre Duff (EPP-ED, Finland), on a register and code of conduct for interest representatives. The report as amended on Tuesday calls for an obligatory registration system common to the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council. The report proposes to set up an inter-institutional working group to move the issue forwards. Regarding financial disclosure the report only asks for the relative share of main clients in the turnover of consultancies to be published. It does not refer to the question of publishing the names of lobbyists. The European Commission is planning to go ahead with the voluntary register for interest representatives despite the European Parliament's call for a mandatory register. It will at the same time continue to explore the possibilities for a common register with the Parliament and Council.

Find the European Parliament [press release](#).

Find an [article](#) including the Civil Society Contact Group position here.

Find an article on the [European Commission's position](#) here.

Revamp for European Commission's ethics code

The College of Commissioners of March 5 adopted guidelines for internal ethics code of the Commission. The document calls on the Commission to

- "Compile a "well-publicised" *statement of principles* of professional ethics.
- Introduce *compulsory training* on ethical issues for certain Commission officials, particularly those "dealing with financial operations". Staff would be required to confirm that they are aware of their ethical obligations by signature.
- Appoint *ethics correspondents* for every DG to act as a contact point for staff, working in a *network* to ensure consistency on ethical issues.
- Establish a "single, all-embracing" *ethics website* collecting "all relevant sources of information on ethics," including staff regulations and financial responsibility guidelines.
- Adopt formal *guidelines* on favours, gifts and hospitality by 2009.
- Draw up a *check-list*, for publication on the ethics website, to help Commission officials to identify conflicts of interest."

Alter – EU, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation, has criticised the move as too weak and not concrete enough.

The [document](#) is available here.

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

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

European Farmers complain about European Commission consultation

The European Farmer Coordination (CPE) and the Spanish Coordination of farmer organisations (COAG) in an open letter blame the European Commission for its undemocratic consultation method on European legislation on the marketing of seeds. A private consultancy has been charged to carry out the consultation and has chosen the tool of an online questionnaire. The framers point out that:

- a large majority of European farmers do not have access to Internet
- the availability of the questionnaire only in English excludes all those who speak another language
- that one requires legal training to understand the technical language used in the questionnaire

The farmers therefore felt that the consultation is biased, that the interest of people concerned will not be largely defended but that a handful transnational seed companies will impose their rules.

Find the open [letter](#) here.

Follow-up to Plan D

Commissioner Wallström on Wednesday presented a new plan aimed at increasing EU citizen's involvement in the decision-making process. The initiative is a follow-up to Plan D and has been named "Debate Europe". A budget of 7.2 Million Euro will be used to fund civil society projects including

- public consultations throughout Europe
- national initiatives giving Europeans the chance to get involved in the EU's decision-making process
- exhibitions, debates and seminars run by the Commission and the European Parliament in capital cities
- support for online networks to share information and ideas

Debate Europe website on http://europa.eu/debateeurope/index_en.htm

Read the Commission's [announcement](#) here.

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

High Level Group on Research and Science: No civil society organizations aboard

Despite claims by Janez Potocnik that civil society is crucial for the European Research Area, DG Research has nominated no civil society representative to its high level Advisory Group on research and science. 22 people will make up the European Research Area Board (ERAB), coming from the fields of science, academia and business. They are supposed to provide "independent and authoritative advice to the European Commission on European research and science policy".

Read more about it and find the names of the 22 members of the ERAB on <http://www.socialplatform.org/News.asp?DocID=17306>

A worldwide Civil Society Index: call for statements of interest

CIVICUS - the worldwide alliance for citizens' participation - has launched a project to index civil society organisation around the world and is looking for partners in Europe. Although civil society is playing an increasingly important role in governance, knowledge about what civil society is, is very limited. The CIVICUS Civil Society Index is supposed to be a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society around the world. The goals are to:

- to enhance the strength and sustainability of civil society,
- to strengthen civil society's contribution to positive social change.

The call for statement has been extended to the 30 April 2008. The project implementation shall start in June 2008 and shall end in 2009.

Find [more information](#) here.

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](#)