

EU Civil Society Contact Group

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1. EDITORIAL

2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

- Civil Society Contact Group says “European Commission voluntary lobby register casts more shadows than it increases transparency”
- Civil Society Contact Group meeting European Commission on EU Budget review
- NGO lunch debate “Financing the EU: where does, could and should the money come from”

3. FUTURE OF EUROPE

- Future of new Treaty for EU after Irish “No”
- CONCORD scrutinises European governments spending on aid
- Sign the petition: At least one woman for EU top positions

4. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

- European Commission proposes changes on access to documents regulation
- European Ombudsman’s status improved through wider access to documents
- Two thematic civil society platforms on ‘access to culture’ and the ‘creative industries’ constituted under European Commission auspices
- The new Justice Forum: DG Justice and Home Affairs structures dialogue with stakeholders
- Social Platform raises serious concerns on the consultation on social realities

5. NEWS FROM MEMBERS

- The European Forum for the Arts and Heritage becomes Culture Action Europe!
- News(letters)

1. EDITORIAL

Dear act4europe friends,

One year from today a new European Parliament will have been elected by the citizens in all 27 EU Member States. It is the first time that Bulgaria and Romania will participate in European elections. The European elections are the biggest existing trans-national elections. They represent a big opportunity for citizens to demonstrate what direction they want the European Union to take. And this might be more important than ever before when we look at the challenges our societies face: environmental degradation, raising food prices, globalised trade, new forms of transnational democracy

As civil society actors, we have a responsibility in the time from now to the elections in early June 2009 (4-7th of June) to inform and mobilise voters. And there are many aspects to that: We can start by explaining the role of the European Parliament. We can engage our members and supporters in discussions with candidates on the issues that matter to them. We can use the elections to point at the links between the concerns and aims of our organisations and European policies. And I am sure you have many more ideas.

We are convinced that you are all prepared to link your ongoing work even more than usual to European debates in the run-up of the elections encouraging your members, supporters, partners and friends to take part in the debates and in the election. The Civil Society Contact Group will be preparing a toolkit that shall support civil society organisations to do so at a local, regional or national level. We keep you posted.

Have a nice summer!

Regula Heggli
Coordinator

2. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP

Civil Society Contact Group says "European Commission voluntary lobby register casts more shadows than it increases transparency"

The eight large European sectors of public interest organizations united in the EU Civil Society Contact Group are disappointed by the voluntary lobby register that the European Commission launched on June 24. Fintan Farrell, chair of the Civil Society Contact Group, comments: "Public interest organisations have supported the Commission's 'European Transparency Initiative' in the past because we hoped that it would lead to real transparency about EU lobbying. The Commission's lobby register was supposed to answer questions such as how many lobbyists are there in Brussels?, who do they work for?, and who is paying them? Unfortunately, the register developed by the Secretary General of the Commission will not provide clear answers to any of these questions." The Civil Society Contact Group criticises in particular that:

- The register requests different types of financial information from different types of actors meaning that the register will not provide comparable financial information to the public.
- The register is limited to organisations and does not request the registration of individual lobbyists working for them.

Read the entire [Civil Society Contact Group press release](#) here.
Find the register on <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regrin/>.
Read the Civil Society Contact Group [letter to Barroso](#) here.

Read articles on the launch of the register on <http://euobserver.com/843/26378> and <http://www.euractiv.com/en/pa/commission-launches-lobbyists-register/article-173591>

Civil Society Contact Group meeting European Commission on EU Budget review

On Tuesday June 10 a Civil Society Contact Group delegation met with the Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Grybauskaitė, Mr Stephen Quest. Fintan Farrell, chair of the Civil Society Contact Group, started the discussion by saying that the Civil Society Contact Group appreciated that

- the period of consultation was quite long
- that the space for answers was not limited
- that all contributions were published online.

He then also made clear that the most important part was still to come and that the Civil Society Contact Group expected the Commission to report on the consultation contributions reasoning why a proposal was or was not taken into account. Different participants then explained in more depth some of the principles in the Civil Society Contact Group contribution.

What are the next steps?

- The Commission will produce a summary document outlining what were the contributions received to the consultation. At that stage the document will not indicate in what direction the Commission proposal will go. This document will be produced before the conference, so in October or November this year.
- The conference planned for May will now take place in November and will be in the form of plenary sessions and interactive workshops. All those who contributed to the budget consultation will receive an invitation. Concerning our request for civil society speakers, Mister Quest only said that the panels would be balanced.
- Anytime before the end of 2009 and most likely in the first half of 2009 the Commission will publish a 'Budget Reform Paper'. This paper is likely to present scenarios i.e. two to three alternatives of how to go ahead.

Find here a [preparatory document](#) for the meeting that outlines the main points made by the Civil Society Contact Group delegation.

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

Find the consultation website at http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/index_en.htm

NGO lunch debate "Financing the EU: where does, could and should the money come from"

The NGO lunch debate organised by the Civil Society Contact Group on the income for the EU budget on May 21, saw more than 35 participants most of them NGO representatives. An introductory briefing looked at where the EU money currently comes from and what alternative sources are being discussed. Claire Roumet, secretary general of the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing CECODHAS then spoke about the unfairness for poor people of consumption based (VAT) instead of wealth based taxation. Pendo Maro explained that the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) calls for *earmarked* environmental taxation. The EEB also proposes to install an open method of coordination (best practice exchange and coordination) in the field of environmental taxation, to respect the great variety of member state systems while still having European coordination.

Find here the slides of the [introductory briefing](#) by Martina Weitsch from the Quaker Council for European Affairs.

Find here the [presentation on environmental taxation](#).

The report of the meeting will soon be available online.

3. FUTURE OF EUROPE

Future of new Treaty for EU after Irish “No”

After the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish voters on June 12, most other Member States have made clear that they have no interest in reopening negotiations although a Eurobarometer survey shows that Irish no-voters expected exactly this. Council President, Nicolas Sarkozy, has nevertheless indicated that there might be room for manoeuvre in adding protocols. Sarkozy will travel to Dublin to discuss the situation with the Irish government before the end of July. While the EU heads of states and governments are expected to discuss the issue again in their October summit, the way forward is not likely to be agreed before the end of the year. The UK and the Netherlands have meanwhile ratified the Treaty. While 21 Member States have ratified the new Treaty, five countries still need to do so. They are the Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

Find here the results of the [Eurobarometer post-referendum survey](#) in Ireland.

Find here a [ratification map](#) by the Robert Schumann Foundation.

CONCORD scrutinises European governments spending on aid

For one example of how NGOs can work on public budgeting and spending look at the CONCORD report [“The Truth about European Development Aid”](#).

Sign the petition: At least one woman for EU top positions

Danish socialist European Parliamentarian Christel Schaldemose has set up an online petition asking for at least one woman to be chosen for taking up one of the EU top positions.

Sign the petition on www.femalesinfront.eu/

4. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

European Commission proposes changes on access to documents regulation

The European Commission on April 30 proposed to amend the regulation on access to documents held by the EU institutions. The Commission claims legitimation for the proposed amendments among others from a public consultation in 2007, to which the Civil Society Contact Group contributed. Statewatch, an NGO working to defend civil liberties, criticises that the Commission didn't consider many of the problems raised by civil society and the European Parliament. Statewatch says that the proposals are “highly retrogressive”:

- the definition of document would become more restrictive referring to legislative and recorded documents only
- the definition of rules for all other documents would be left to each EU institution individually
- the general principle that all documents in the public register should be as far as possible directly accessible, would be deleted

Also the Swedish justice minister Beatrice Ask doesn't see how the proposal would improve transparency. She says the contrary might even be the case. The Swedish government is looking for allies in the European Parliament and among Member States to change the direction of the changes proposed by the Commission. The European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs organised a public hearing “Towards a European Freedom of Information Act” on Monday June 2.

Find the [Statewatch analysis](#) here.

Statewatch has created an observatory on EU developments on access to documents. Find it on <http://www.statewatch.org/foi/foi.htm>

Find here the consolidate version of the [regulation](#) published by Statewatch.

Read the [Commission press release](#).

Read the [Civil Society Contact Group contribution](#) to the consultation.

Read an [article about the Swedish position](#) here.

Find all documents presented in the [European Parliament](#) hearing here.

European Ombudsman's status improved through wider access to documents

The European Parliament 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.

Read articles on the issue on <http://euobserver.com/9/26025/?rk=1> and <http://www.euractiv.com/en/pa/mixed-message-transparency-parliament-votes/article-171841>

Two thematic civil society platforms on 'access to culture' and the 'creative industries' constituted under European Commission auspices

Following a call for expressions of interest, the European Commission selected 39 and 33 organisations respectively to participate in the constitutive meetings of the above mentioned platforms. Only non-governmental cultural organisations with a trans-national or European dimension qualified. The Commission had set very clear goal posts: the governing structure of both platforms had to be decided by the end of the respective meeting as well as the main thematic areas to be addressed by each Platform. The decision on the governing bodies was more easily achieved in the first platform. Although rather mixed in terms of specific interests, there was still a sense of common commitment emerging. In the second platform the mistrust between different interests was more evident and as a result the decision on the chair only came about at the very last minute.

For more information click [here](#).

The new Justice Forum: DG Justice and Home Affairs structures dialogue with stakeholders

DG Justice and Home Affairs has launched a forum with stakeholders. The objectives are to promote dialogue between the European Commission and stakeholders in the justice system of Member States. Unfortunately, neither the participants nor the work programme are listed on the website of the Forum. Among the participants are NGOs, but also lawyers, judges, legal translators, and prosecutors. The Justice Forum is to discuss and assess existing EU legislation and possible future legislations. In 2008, the Forum will focus on mutual recognition in criminal matters, e-justice and victims' rights.

Find more information [here](#).

Relevant European associations, who wish to become member of the Justice Forum, can send a request for registration to jls-justiceforum@ec.europa.eu.

Social Platform raises serious concerns on the consultation on social realities

In a letter addressed to the Commission's President Barroso in late May, the Social Platform raised serious concerns as regards the consultation process on the social reality stocktaking. The Platform underlines that social NGOs have not been given the chance to contribute to the Commission's social vision set up in a communication in November and that their contributions on social realities cannot be used to justify the seven priorities the Commission had identified at the time.

Read more and find the letter [here](#).

5. NEWS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY CONTACT GROUP MEMBERS

The European Forum for the Arts and Heritage becomes Culture Action Europe!

EFAH's new name and visual identity were launched at the 65th Trans Europe Halles meeting in Brussels on 24th April 2008. The rebrand is strong, accessible, non technocratic and above all engaged. The move away from an acronym clears up confusion about the organisation's identity, and the word 'action' states its ambition to be a proactive advocate for the cultural sector at European level. It symbolises the coming of age of the platform as a professional lobby for the arts with a broader interest in culture, and signals a shift towards a more strategic and communicative organisation.

The new website illustrates these changes: <http://www.cultureactioneurope.org>

Members' latest news(letters)

[CONCORD](#)

[EUCIS-LLL](#)

[Culture Action Europe](#)

[European Public Health Alliance](#)

[European Women's Lobby](#)

[Green10](#)

[Social Platform](#)