

EU Civil Society Contact Group

Civil society should not be shut out from EU treaty revision

Civil Society Contact Group call on the heads of state and government for an effective treaty and a transparent and accessible Inter-Governmental Conference

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The EU Civil Society Contact Group¹, representing eight large European networks of NGOs, criticises plans by the Council to prepare and agree a revised EU treaty through a closed Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) with a restricted mandate.

No retreat from the achievements of the convention

Throughout the convention on the Future of Europe and the Intergovernmental Conference, members of the Civil Society Contact Group campaigned for a text that reflects concerns of citizens. Following the current negotiations and debates we are deeply worried that important achievements of the convention and the draft constitution will be lost.

A more coherent European project to respond to common challenges both within and outside of Europe is urgently needed. We urge the Council to take action to maintain the following points as part of a new EU treaty. We are convinced that they are crucial for the future of the EU:

- It is indispensable to include the **Charter of Fundamental Rights** in a new treaty. Only by doing so will the interests and concerns of many citizens be taken seriously.
- Key components of part III of the draft Constitution including the reconfirmed policies on **environment** (III-233), the new **energy** chapter (III-256), the horizontal **social clauses** (article III 116,117,118,122) as well as the strengthening of Europe's **development** policy (III 316,317,318,319) and its ability to play a responsible **role in world** (III-292) need to be retained in a new treaty.
- The principle of **participatory democracy (I-47)** underlies all our activities. It is important that this becomes a treaty provision. It would support the endeavours of a variety of actors who aim to strengthen democracy in the EU.
- The **extension of qualified majority voting** is essential for an EU of 27 to function.

Civil society challenges Council to open up inter-governmental approach

Traditionally IGCs have been closed processes offering no possibilities for civil society to engage. A coherent and effective strategy of involving civil society is urgently needed to engage European citizens in the process and inform its outcomes. Such a strategy should include:

- **Regular meetings between civil society and the presidency** of the Union,
- A **website where civil society positions** on the treaty revision could be posted and accessed by all member states,
- **Discussions in the IGC should be public**, and transmitted via European broadcast system (Ebs) and a dedicated website

Citizens want and expect Europe to provide moral and accountable leadership. The treaty revision will be an important step in re-connecting Europeans to the EU if it takes their concerns seriously.

¹ *The EU Civil Society Contact Group brings together the Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform), the European NGO confederation for relief and development (Concord), the Human Rights and Democracy Network, the Green 10 (environmental organisations), the European Women's Lobby, the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (EFAH), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL). Encompassing hundreds of European NGOs and thousands of national affiliates, they work together to develop the dialogue between civil society organisations and the EU institutions as an essential part of strengthening participatory democracy.*