

# EUROPEAN HUMANIST FEDERATION

## REPORT ON ACTIVITIES 2003 - 2004

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# **EUROPEAN HUMANIST FEDERATION**

## **REPORT ON ACTIVITIES 2003 - 2004**

The report on activities has been drawn up for the period going from April 2003 to March 2004.

All the EHF documents are available on EHF website, [www.humanism.be](http://www.humanism.be)

## **General Assembly**

The General Assembly (GA) was held in Brussels on 15 June 2003. A guided tour of Brussels “[Paths of humanism in Brussels](#)” and a workshop in collaboration with the [European Humanist Professionals](#) and the [Centre d’Action Laïque](#), on “[A humanist approach for a better citizenship](#)” had been organised for the GA participants the previous day.

The GA approved the report on activities for 2002, the accounts for 2002, the budget for 2003, a provisional budget for 2004 and the working plan for 2003-2004. The GA re-elected T. de Groot, G. Liénard, S. Nilsen and W. Schultz as members of the Board, no other applications having been received. It re-appointed T. De Groot, G. Liénard and W. Schultz to the Membership Committee for 2004.

Luc Devuyt and Eric Mauquoy were re-appointed auditors for 2003.

EHF GA admitted a new member organisation, the Comitato Torinese per la Laicità della Scuola (Italy).

EHF had already started implementing a protocol agreement adopted with the International Humanist and Ethical Union, in March 2003.

The GA agreed on an increase of the annual dues proposed by the Board : Group 4 of the full members would be 250 euros instead of 150 and Group 5 (consultative members) would increase from 50 to 100 euros. This would allow EHF to help humanist organisations in the candidate countries to participate to EHF meetings and also to support the setting up of activities with a view to promoting humanism in those countries.

## Meetings of the Board

### 15 June 2003 – Brussels

Election of positions on the [Board](#) – Review of future activities - Participation to “[A Soul for Europe – Ethics and Spirituality](#)” – Participation to actions and events related to the draft European Constitution and to its article 51 – Organisation of a two-day conference in Rome with the Unione degli Ateisti e degli Agnostici Razionalisti, on “[Secularism is essential for the equal treatment of citizens by the institutions](#)”.

### 28 November 2003 – Rome

Overview of the member organisation annual dues for 2003 and of EHF financial situation - Proposal of budget for 2004 – Information on [IHEYO](#) (International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation) and its European Planning Group – Review of actions, events and campaigns set up for the withdrawal of [Article 51](#) from the draft [European Constitution](#) – Application for a subsidy from the European Commission for the creation of a web site “[Networking for Equality](#)”.

### 6 March 2004 – Brussels

Finalisation of the report on activities for 2003 – Drafting of a working plan for 2004-2005 – Preparation of the 2004 General Assembly - Financial situation of EHF - Brainstorming session on how to increase the federation income - Memorandum for the European elections of June 2004 presenting the demands of the humanist movement to be sent to EHF member organisations for circulation to political parties and to candidates to the elections of the different countries.

## Composition of the Board

President : Steinar Nilsen (Norway)

First Vice-President : Vera Pegna (Italy)

Vice-President : Tryntsje de Groot (Netherlands)

Secretary General : Georges Liénard (Belgium)

Treasurer : Suzy Mommaerts (Belgium)

Members : Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, (France), Werner Schultz (Germany)

## European Institutions

EHF has been mainly focused during the whole year 2003 – and still is in 2004 – on the drafting of the European Constitution. The neutrality of the European Institutions is really being threatened. EHF is strongly opposed to any intervention of Churches and more particularly of the Vatican in the European Union.

## Convention for the Future of Europe

Created following the Laeken European Council in December 2001, the European Convention brought together representatives of governments, national parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission. Its main purpose was the drafting of a European Constitution.

The EHF working group had drawn up several documents.  
<http://www.humanism.be/new/english/5-2-unionlobbying.htm>

EHF's main concern is to see that the future Constitution is in no way discriminatory according to the religious or philosophical convictions and that it is inspired by the principles of secularism of society.

## Draft European Constitution

- **Preamble**

Ever since the preamble of the draft Constitution was issued, EHF campaigned along with European humanist organisations to oppose any reference to a god or to a Christian heritage in the preamble. <http://www.humanism.be/new/english/5-2-unionlobbying.htm>

Their positions were posted on the official European Convention website <http://european-convention.eu.int>

EHF and its member organisations circulated many documents on the importance of the separation between Churches and the European Institutions. They also wrote to members of the European Convention, of the European Parliament, of national Parliaments, Ministers and to many different authorities.

The humanist points of view have also been widely spread through the medias (and also of course humanist medias) all over Europe.

A résumé of activities, interventions and meetings organised by EHF and member organisations can be found in [appendix 1](#) of this report.

- **Article 37 (CONV 650/03), modified as article 51**

Immediately after the release of article 37, beginning of April 2003, EHF led a Europe-wide campaign to have the article deleted from the draft Constitution. The constitutional text should pave the way to doing away with all forms of privileges in order to guarantee and better safeguard social cohesion. Humanists were not alone against this article, 163 members of the European Parliament had signed a draft Resolution for the respect of the principles of religious freedom and the secular nature of the State. See also <http://www.humanism.be/new/english/5-3-constitlobbying.htm>

Many pluralist and even catholic organisations saw too the dangers hidden in the text of article 37.

- **Petition against article 51 (ex 37) (CONV 724/1/03)**

End of April 2003, five European networks : International Planned Parenthood Federation/ European network, [European Network "Church on the move"](#), Right to die in Europe, European Federation for Education and Culture, and EHF decided to launch an “ Appeal to the European Convention ” and asked for the support of their members.

The signatory organisations stated their concern “about preserving and continuing to develop the gains acquired in their various fields of activity, be it in the field of education, morality, family and the condition of women, contraception, abortion, euthanasia, divorce or sexual orientation, etc...”

They noted that article 37 provided Churches with a right to regular intervention into the policy-making of the European Union, thus allowing them to assert their religious options on matters listed above and many others such as discrimination against women, homosexuals, the fight against HIV/AIDS or on issues related to biomedical research.

The separation of Church and State must apply to all areas of community life.”

The petition was signed by thousands of people and nearly 200 organisations in Europe and worldwide, representing millions of citizens.

- **Press conference – 6 June 2003 – Brussels European Parliament**

EHF and the four other European networks organised a press conference in the Brussels European Parliament, supported by several European MP’s. A press release was issued and reported by press agencies and on several television channels.

- **Campaign of letters for the withdrawal of article 51 (ex 37) to the European Council of Ministers**

In September 2003, EHF, along with its member organisations and other European humanist associations, launched a campaign of letters to national Ministers in the E.U. countries demanding the withdrawal of article 51.

There was a huge response as article 51 had not been presented for discussion at the European Convention and as at the time, it was thought that the first Constitution would have to be drawn up before the end of the year 2003.

- **Press conference – 5 November 2003 - Brussels European Parliament**

Another press conference took place in the European Parliament, on 5 November 2003, set up by European MP Olga Zrihen with EHF and a coalition of pluralistic, catholic and humanist NGO's.

It showed how the Churches, under the cover of “dialogue” are trying to obtain a privileged status in the E.U.

Two important documents were presented: "The demands of Churches to EU Institutions" and "Intervention of the Churches in the EU". (Available on EHF web site and in [appendix 2](#) and [appendix 3](#) of this report).

- **Meeting with members of the European Parliament – 3 December 2003 – Brussels European Parliament**

A meeting with European MP's was organised by EHF and MP Olga Zrihen to show the great concern of many European NGO's and networks that article 51 would institutionalise a right of interference of Churches in matters under the competence of EU institutions.

A large audience followed the presentation of the different positions against article 51 by the International Planned Parenthood Federation/European Network, Catholics for a Free Choice/Europe, the European Network Church on the Move, Right to Die Europe, the International Lesbian and Gay Association/Europe, the Association des Femmes de l'Europe Méridionale, the European Federation for Education and Culture.

The meeting was mentioned in the press and on television channels in different European countries.

## **European Economic and Social Committee**

EHF was present every month at the sessions of information and dialogue on the European Convention proceedings and the draft European Constitution held by the EESC.

On 8-9 March 2004, G. Liénard and S. Mommaerts took part in a conference organised by the EESC on “Participatory Democracy: state of play and perspectives provided in European Constitution”.

## **European Parliament**

- **6 May 2003 – Brussels - European Parliament**

EHF took part in a meeting with Antonio Vitorino, European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, set up by the European Parliament Socialist Group. Topic : “Does the draft Constitution meet our expectations ?”

## **European Commission**

- **Meeting with President Prodi**

EHF wrote to the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, in May 2003 and asked for an audience in order to present the expectations of the humanist movement like COMECE (Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community) and KEK (Conference of European Churches) had done several times previously.

In July 2003, President Prodi made his staff answer that his schedule was too busy.

EHF wrote again to Romano Prodi, in December 2003, stating that not receiving representatives of the European humanists was akin to discrimination against non-believers and wondering about the implementation of article 51 of the draft European Constitution if it ever was adopted.

Copies of the letter were addressed to Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, and to European Commissioners Barnier, Diamantopoulou and Vitorino.

- **Group of Policy Advisers (GOPA)**

The Group which reports directly to President Prodi, has in its remit the dialogue with Churches, religions and humanist bodies, the institutional reforms and the contact with the countries candidate to the enlargement.

The GOPA sets up briefing meetings after each Council of Ministers for the representatives of various life stances, among which EHF for the European humanist movement.

- **6 March 2003 – Brussels - European Commission – “Meeting on Enlargement”**

EHF was present at a consultation meeting between Wim Kok and organisations representative of civil society at European level about the implications and challenges of the extension of the EU.

- **12-13 June 2003 – Brussels – European Commission – Conference “Governance of the European research area : The role of civil society”**

EHF Secretary General attended this conference.

## **Activities and actions with member organisations**

## **7 April 2003 – Torino (Italy) – Conference “ La laicità : una questione aperta per l’Europa”**

Conference organised by the Comitato Torinese per la Laicità della Scuola (<http://www.arpnet.it/laisc>) during which EHF Secretary General gave a talk on “Della Carta europea dei diritti alle prospettive della Costituzione europea.

## **22 May 2003 – Berlin (Germany) – Conference “Gott und Religion in Europa”**

A talk on "The European Constitution and the role of the churches" was given by EHF Secretary General at this conference organised by the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands and the European Academy in Germany. (<http://www.humanismus.de>)

## **14 June 2003 – Brussels (Belgium) - Guided tour of Brussels “Paths of humanism in Brussels”**

Set up by EHF for the member organisation representatives at the GA.

This tour explored, in a non-theoretical or philosophical way, traces of concrete humanism left by famous humanists in the streets of Brussels. Unfortunately the weather was not very good hence the small turnout of 6 participants.

## **14 June 2003 – Brussels (Belgium) – Workshop “A humanist approach for a better citizenship”**

Set up by the [European Humanist Professionals](#), the [Centre d’Action Laïque](#) (Belgium) and EHF.

Grass-roots experiences were presented by Belgian humanist professionals and as well as a video film on an intercultural exchange in Brussels.

## **27 August 2003 – Brussels (Belgium) – Seminar “Vrijzinnige structuren”**

EHF General Secretary gave a talk on “De georganiseerde vrijzinnigheid in Europa”.

Seminar set up by the Humanische Jongeren.

## **6 October 2003 – Brussels (Belgium) – Seminar “Vivre la diversité”**

EHF General Secretary gave a talk on “Laïcité et citoyenneté : les perspectives européennes”. Seminar set up by Bruxelles Laïque.

## **22 October 2003 – Brussels (Belgium)– Belgium Senate – “Article 51”**

Hearing with Belgian Senators on why withdrawing article 51 from the draft European Constitution. With Centre d’Action Laïque, Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen, and other main Belgian associations.

## **13 November 2003 – Paris (France) – Social European Forum**

In the framework of the 10th Social European Forum, a large forum with more than 200 workshops, 50 seminars shared out between five cities around Paris, a colloquium prepared by the Ligue française de l’Enseignement and the Union des Familles Laïques, was devoted to "Laicity in the European institutions". EHF Secretary General presented a talk on the danger article 51 should present for the separation of Churches and States in Europe.

## **29-30 November 2003 – Rome (Italy) – International colloquium “ Secularism is essential for the equal treatment of citizens by the institutions ”**

Organised by the Unione degli Ateisti e degli Agnostici Razionalisti (<http://www.uaar.it>) and EHF. EHF Board members S. Nilsen, V. Pegna, and G. Liénard delivered talks and chaired a session.

A large audience attended the meeting organised under the sponsorship of the City of Rome. Summary minutes of the colloquium prepared by V.Pegna are on <http://www.humanism.be/new/english/6-1-documents.htm>

The video" [2500 years of Free Thinking](#)" was presented for the first time in its Italian version.

## **6 December 2003 – Paris (France) – International meeting “ For secularity in Europe ”**

S. Mommaerts and G. Liénard took part in the meeting organised by the National Secular Society and the Fédération nationale de la Libre Pensée. EHF General Secretary stressed why article 51 had to be deleted from the draft European Constitution and circulated EHF documents on this matter. Further to this meeting, IHEU (International Humanist and Ethical Union) relayed the EHF campaign and wrote to the governments of E.U. countries asking also for the deletion of article 51.

## **Enhancement of the visibility of EHF and of humanism**

### **Initiative “A Soul for Europe – Ethics and Spirituality”**

The initiative was made into a non-profit international organisation under Belgian law in 2003.

The partners succeeded in managing the tensions created by the differences of viewpoints between them concerning the draft European Constitution.

In order to clarify its mandate, the initiative organised, in June 2003, an internal seminar which has set three major goals for the coming years :

- Serve as a think tank on issues which are related both to dialogue within the Initiative, and to the European integration project;
- Promote dialogue between communities of faith and conviction and the European institutions;
- Monitor and support the European institutions in their efforts to foster dialogue among these communities, and develop and implement ethical and spiritual values as a basis for an integrated Europe.

In December 2003, the Initiative held a meeting between its board and different other organisations involved in the field of inter-religious dialogue : International Association for Religious Freedom, International Interfaith Centre, Minorities of Europe, United Religions Initiative, World Congress of Faith et World Conference of Religions for Peace.

All year long, A Soul Europe has maintained contacts with M. Weninger, member of the Group of Political Advisers to the Presidency of the European Commission.

Members of the Initiative «A Soul for Europe – Ethics and Spirituality»: COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community), KEK (Conference of European Churches), Conference of European Rabbis, Orthodox Oecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Muslims Council for Cooperation in Europe, Fédération Humaniste Européenne (representatives : G. Liénard and Cl. Wachtelaer, who is currently vice-president of the Board).

## **European Planning Group of IHEYO**

The EHF Board agreed on having regular contacts and informal collaboration with the European Planning Group of IHEYO (International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation - [www.ihoyo.org](http://www.ihoyo.org)) which is the youth umbrella organisation for humanist youth (up to 35 years of age) around the world. The European Planning Group wants to develop a stronger presence of the humanist youth on a European level (e.g. joining the European Youth Forum [www.youthforum.org](http://www.youthforum.org)), to set up projects for humanist youth and get funding for these.

## **Networking for Equality**

EHF has introduced an application for a grant from the European Commission to set up a website to enlarge inter-network and inter-life stance co-operation in the European civil society. EHF and its partner NGO's, even though they are active in different domains, often

share the same goals : defending equality and struggling against discrimination. The aim of the website “Networking for Equality” is to raise awareness and inform about discrimination. There will be a discussion forum and experts having the know-how to treat specific issues will moderate the discussions.

## Egroups

EHF moderates two European humanist egroups :

- **ehffhemo**

This EHF member organisations network is a virtual general assembly. Membership is limited to the EHF board, member organisations and key persons appointed by the associations to interact with EHF. It is for communicating what concerns member organisations, e.g. administrative matters, internal discussions, actions, activities,...

- **ehffhe-info**

This egroup is used to circulate more general Europe-related information that might also be of interest to any humanist (e.g. humanist professionals, members, organisations, European civil servants as well as sympathisers). It is a large discussion group about European issues and actions. People can post on it ideas, documents, items for discussion, requests for information, advertisement for activities, etc ...

post message: [ehffhe-info@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ehffhe-info@yahoogroups.com)

subscribe: [ehffhe-info-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ehffhe-info-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

unsubscribe: [ehffhe-info-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ehffhe-info-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com)

In February 2004, there was a very lively discussion related to the French law on the wearing of religious signs with messages posted from all over Europe.

## Web site

The EHF web site [www.humanism.be](http://www.humanism.be) which is in two languages (French and English) has been revamped in 2004 to be friendlier and easier to visit and find documents and information.

The *EHF Eurozine* is posted monthly to keep everyone informed of what goes in the world of European humanism.

## Collaboration with other organisations

- **European Network for Peace and Human Rights**

EHF is a member of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights set up by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. The network aims at building and securing peace,

guaranteeing human rights and protecting the environment. It calls for new concepts of security, nuclear disarmament, welfare not warfare, education for peace, ... ([www.russfound.org](http://www.russfound.org))

- **United**

EHF is part of the network UNITED, European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees, which gathers more than 550 organisations from all European countries. UNITED publishes a bimonthly calendar containing detailed information on the action campaigns, a yearly "European Address Book Against Racism" which comprises the addresses of over 1500 organisations active in the field and produces material such as posters, brochures and leaflets, ... ([www.unitedagainstracism.org](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org))

- **Permanent Forum of Civil Society**

EHF took part regularly to the meetings of the Permanent Forum of Civil Society the main concerns of which for 2003 was the [Convention for the Future of Europe](#) and the drafting of the European Constitution.

- **Thinking freely about Europe**

This cultural club recognised by the European Commission and supported by EHF aims at fostering, in Brussels, a network of people having close connections with the European institutions and at guaranteeing a permanent visibility for humanism among the civil servants of the European institutions and the public interested in European matters.

A lunch and debate is organised in a restaurant in Brussels once a month. See also <http://www.humanism.be/new/english/3-1-2-lunchdebate.htm>

- **8 March – Paris (France) – Conference on “ Pour un recadrage républicain de la bioéthique ”**

EHF Secretary General, G. Liénard, took an active part in one of the five round tables of the conference organised by the Union Rationaliste (<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/union-rationaliste/>)

- **March 2003 – Fighting discrimination**

EHF wrote to the Indian authorities to protest the harassment of rationalist leader Sreeni Pattathanam who was subjected to because of a book he had written.

- **2 May 2003 - European Network Church-on-the-Move**

Meeting with representatives of this network which co-ordinates more than 30 catholic and oecumenical networks and groups from 14 countries of Western and Central Europe and works to the reform of the Catholic Church, against exclusions and discriminations, towards a humane and democratically controlled globalisation.

The main topic of the meeting was the European Constitution and its article 51.

- **7 July 2003 – Poppi (Italy) - Congress “Individual liberties – collective liberties”**

V. Pegna, EHF Vice-President, gave a talk on “Secularism, an essential prerequisite for democracy” during the session on individual liberties, and G. Liénard one on “How secular is the European Constitution” during the session on collective liberties.

The director of IHEU, Babu Cogineni, delivered a talk on "Rationalism, humanism and the future of human liberty". All three chaired a session.

The congress was organised in the old castle of Poppi by the Instituto di Studi Storici Tommaso Crudeli and the Commune di Poppi, City of Tolerance.

EHF was also represented at the presentation of the “International Historical Court” devoted to reconstruct accurately historical legal cases (older than 100 years) where the most basic human liberties were denied and to attribute responsibilities.

- **4-5-6 July 2003 – Albacete (Spain) - III Encuentro por la laicidad**

EHF Treasurer, S. Mommaerts participated on behalf of the Federation, to the third meeting of the Spanish humanist organisations. More than a hundred participants, representing 18 organisations, discussed current topics : secularism and the building of Europe, laicity at school, fundamental rights, and the present situation of humanism in Spain. The congress opened with a talk by European MP Maurizio Turco. A « manifesto for coordination » was on the agenda of the last day. The congress ended with an agreement to create an “umbrella organisation” for laicity. The next (fourth) meeting will take place in Madrid in 2004.

- **27 August –2 September 2003 – Berlin (Germany) - Congress IHEYO**

A representative of the EHF (Gert Van Eeckhout) took part in the congress. He presented a text in the workshop on “Religious fundamentalism”.

A hot item for European humanists was article 51 which (when approved/ratified) would give the Catholic Church an institutionalised consultative role in Europe. The recommendation was made for IHEYO to get involved in the European consultative bodies for youth in order to be able to influence decision taking.

He also collaborated with Frederik Dezutter (Belgium, UVV) to the working group that amended and reformulated IHEYO's draft by-laws that were accepted by the IHEYO GA on 2 September 2003.

- **18 September 2003 – Udine (Italy) – Meeting “Will the EU institutions be secular ?”**

EHF was represented by V. Pegna at an update on article 51 of the draft European Constitution followed by a lively debate focused on whether a United Europe can help Italy alleviate the interference of the Vatican. Organised by an UAAR club.

- **20 September 2003 – Rome (Italy) – Demonstration “No Taliban – no Vatican”**

EHF Vice-President, V. Pegna took part on behalf of EHF in a demonstration “for freedom of thought, of conscience and of belief, and for freedom of scientific research”.

- **7 October 2003 – Brussels (Belgium) – Act4Europe**

EHF participated in a campaign coordination meeting set up by the Civil Society Contact Group and the Act4Europe Campaign, in connection with the October 2003 Intergovernmental Conference.

- **26 October 2003 – Rome (Italy) – Conference “Progresso, liberta, giustizia all’insegna della laicità : il modello Nathan”**

EHF Vice-President, V. Pegna took part to this conference organised by the Associazione Nazionale del Libero Pensiero Giodano Bruno, on behalf of EHF.

- **7 November 2003 – Chaumont-Gistoux (Belgium) – Talk “Laïcité et convention européenne”**

Talk by G. Liénard in the Humanist House of Chaumont-Gistoux.

- **10 November 2003 – Brussels (Belgium) – Seminar “Power and religion”**

G. Liénard gave a talk on humanism at this annual seminar organised by the Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis.

- **15-16 November 2003 – London (U.K.) – Conference “Empowering women”**

About 50 persons from 16 countries of Europe, Asia, America and Africa took part in the conference. The topics were economic independence, non discriminative birth control, women’s health, the right to education, the secularism of societies versus male domination imposed by religions whatever they may be. The conclusion was the necessity of setting up an International Federation of Humanist Women under the auspices of IHEU. A web site has been created. EHF was represented at the congress by S. Mommaerts.

- **29-30 November 2003 – Bordeaux (France) - International conference “Laïcité, une idée européenne”**

On behalf of EHF, Claude Wachtelaer gave a talk on “Secularism, religious lobbying, which purpose will article 51 serve?”

- **13 January 2004 – Lecce (Italy) - “Secularism is essential for a democratic EU”.**

Secularism, humanism and an update on article 51.EHF represented by V. Pegna. Organised by the local UAAR club.

- **6 February 2004 – Brussels (Belgium) – International conference “L’Europe, une chance pour la femme musulmane ?”**

La Pensée et les Hommes co-organised with EHF this international conference that took place in the Brussels European Parliament. More than 350 persons attended it among whom a large number of Muslims.

The progress of the equality between men and women in Marocco and Tunisia were stressed. The larger subject of “ Islam, women and human rights ” was studied.

G. Liénard called humanists to privilege dialogue with the Muslim immigration in Europe rather than vote repressive laws.

- **5-6 February 2004 – Lille (France) – Conference “Europe, citoyenneté et franc-maçonnerie”**

The conference was organised by IDERM-Septentrion and the Cercle Erasme, with the support of different organisations among which Res Publica and the Union des Familles Laïques.

The Cercle Erasme collaborated with EHF to draw up the documents concerning the E.U.

The subjects of the conference were the draft European Constitution, European citizenship and the comparison between participative and elective democracy.

G. Liénard was moderator for one of the sessions. He presented EHF position on article 51 of the draft European Constitution. The proceedings of the conference are to be published (in French).

- **6 March 2004 – Turino (Italy) - International seminar “Secularism, citizenship and the European Constitution”**

Organised jointly, in the framework of Socrates, by Comitato Torinese per la Laicità della Scuola and CEMEA, a French association which disseminates methods of active education and is present all over Europe. V. Pegna gave the opening talk which was an update on the meaning of secularism in today’s EU, the teaching of religion at school that should stress equal respect for all life-stances and the real scope of article 51 of the European constitution.

## **Publications**

- **“Islam et musulmans dans l’espace européen : défis de la laïcité”**

The publication of the proceedings (in French) of the international conference “Islam et musulmans dans l’espace européen : défis de la laïcité” was announced with a press

conference co-organised by EHF, La Pensée et les Hommes and the Centre d'Action Laïque, on 23 September 2003.

Available at [espace@cal.ulb.be](mailto:espace@cal.ulb.be)

The book was awarded the Second Prize "Jeunesse et Education permanente 2004" by the Communauté française de Belgique.

- **“Humanism and democracy in Central Europe : Coexistence of different life stances”**

The proceedings (in English) of the conference organised in Warsaw, in 2002, by EHF and the Polish Humanist Federation have been published with the financial support of the European Commission.

Available from the EHF office in Brussels.

- **Video film “2500 years (and more) of Free Thinking”**

The film produced by three Belgian organisations, Centre d'Action Laïque, Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen and the Centre Laïque Audiovisuel, with the support of EHF, came out in September 2003 in French and Dutch. A very large audience attended the preview, in Brussels, which was followed by a debate.

The video film has been translated into four other languages (German, Spanish, Italian and English) thanks to a subsidy from the European Commission .

Available in VHS from the EHF office for 12 euro a copy (postage included) – 25 % reduction for 5 or more copies.

It will be available on DVD end of 2004.

## **Conclusion**

Most of EHF activity has been devoted to efforts to change the draft European Constitution. The work can be divided into three parts.

The first one consisted in sending proposals and humanist positions to the Convention, prepared by an EHF working group.

After publication of title VI on “Democratic life in the Union” and its article 51 giving a privileged position to the Churches, a campaign for the withdrawal of this article 51 was launched together with several other networks.

This resulted in a large support to EHF from many individuals and other new partners working to attain the same goals.

When the Constitution was handed over to State representatives, EHF modified its strategy by asking its members to write directly to their government. Some of our associations did a more successful job than others, but all were convinced that EU as a secular organisation was in danger.

A hearing and press conferences in the European Parliament gave good visibility to our position as well as EHF accrued presence at many national and international events, often together with other secular associations and NGO's.

EHF was particularly happy by the support of IHEU to its campaign in sponsoring, at the end of the year, one of the many initiatives held in different countries.

The translation into six languages of the video "[2500 years of Free Thinking](#)" produced with a financial support of the European Commission, received a large and enthusiastic welcome.

The web site and the two e-groups are now fully operational.

# Appendix 1

## For the withdrawal of article 51 from the draft European Constitution

### Meetings in 2003

Meetings and activities with respect to the European Constitution organised by EHF and by humanist or friend organisations (at least those meetings for which we have received information).

For details, see the EHF activity report for 2003.

LICHTENFELS (Germany) 24-26.01.2003 — "Für ein Europa der Bürger" organised by DFW

BRUSSELS 28.02.2003 "Islam and Muslims in Europe" in partnership with the Belgian "La Pensée et les Hommes"

TORINO (Italy) 07.04.2003 — La laicità : una questione aperta per l'Europa, organised by Comitato Torinese per la Laicità della Scuola

BRUSSELS, 04.05.2003 – Appeal to the Convention, launched by EHF and 5 Euro networks

This appeal was supported by about 200 associations representing several millions of individual members

BRUSSELS, EURO PARLIAMENT, 06.05.2003, Hearing of Euro NGO's by socialist group of the EU Parliament "Does the draft Constitution meet our expectations ?"

BERLIN 22.05.2003 — Gott und Religion in Europa, organised by HV Deutschland

BRUSSELS, EURO PARLIAMENT, 06.06.2003 Press conference "For withdrawal of article 51", in collaboration with several European Networks comprising masonic and catholic organisations.

Presentation of the results of the European appeal to the Convention (see Agence Europe)

POPPI (Italy) 07.07.2003 — Individual liberties – collective liberties, organised by Istituto Di Studi Storici Tommaso Crudeli

ALBACETE (Spain) 04-06.07.2003 — 3rd Encuentro por la laicidad, organised by Asociación Europa Laica

BRUXELLES 27.08.2003 (Humanistische Jongeren) – Vrijzinnige structuren and EU

BERLIN 27.08/2.09 2003 Workshop on religious fundamentalism at IHEYO congress (talk on article 51)

UDINE 18.09.2003 – Will the EU institutions be secular – Update on article 51

BRUXELLES 06.10.2003 Vivre dans la diversité, colloquium of Brussels regionale CAL

BRUSSELS 07.10.2003 A meeting of the civil society contact group, Act4Europ

In 15 EURO COUNTRIES, October and November, EU Campaign for withdrawal of article 51 (by personal letter and email to national ministers in their language), organised by EHF with its member associations accompanied by many other organisations

BRUSSELS, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT November 5, press conference "the reasons for withdrawal of article 51", organised at EHF initiative with euro MP's, jointly with 6 Euro networks

BRUSSELS 10.11.2003– Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis – Séminaire pluri-religieux  
" Pouvoir et religion "

PARIS, November 13, European Social Forum: " Laïcité in Europe", organised jointly by Ligue française de l'enseignement, UFAL, EHF and others

BRUSSELS, November 20, together with Centre d'action laïque, audience with Belgian minister of foreign affairs: confirmation of Belgian government position for withdrawal of article 51

BORDEAUX, November 29 and 30, " Laïcité, an European idea", organised by Comité laïcité république, with participation of EHF

ROME, November 29 and 30, "European Constitution, indispensable humanism", organised jointly by UAAR and EHF

BRUSSELS EURO PARLIAMENT December 3, hearing of Euro NGOs network, (IPPF, 2 catholics euro networks, IIGA, AFEM, Act4 Europe, Right to Die Europe, Euro teaching Federation and other NGOs), organised jointly by Euro MP's and EHF

PARIS, December 6, "Pour la laïcité en Europe", organised jointly by National Secular Society and Libre Pensée française, sponsored by IHEU

PARIS, December 13, International observatory for Laicity, with collaboration of EHF

Interviews:

Belgian and Dutch TV and radio

Newspapers in Denmark, Italy, France, Belgium, Germany

6 March 2004

# Appendix 2

[Click here](#)

# Appendix 3

## Intervention of the Churches in the E.U.

### First step

In March 1996, during the preparation of the Intergovernmental Conference of Turin, a note was given to the ambassadors of E.U. countries accredited to the State of the Holy See.

The Holy See declares that the following objectives should be reached :

- emphasize the contribution of the Churches and religions to the development of Europe
- maintain the relations between the Churches and the States as they are within the Member States
- avoid that one system of relations between Church and State could supplant another
- root the relations between Church and State in the Community Law
- avoid any discrimination against Churches and religions with regard to other social movements already appreciated on a Community level
- protect the competence of States in their present relations with Churches and religions.

This document was not taken into consideration by the European Council of Ministers on the grounds that the Holy See was not part of the European Union.

### • **Second step**

Some time later, the delegations of three Member States of the European Union (Germany on one side, Italy and Austria on another side), followed by Portugal, introduced to the Dutch Presidency of the Union a proposition to include into the Rome Treaty, during the Amsterdam IGC of 1997, a specific mention of the place of the Churches in the European cultural heritage and of their own particular status.

Article F "Fundamental Rights", according to his proposition, should have been completed as follows:

"The Union shall respect the constitutional status of religious communities in the Member States as a manifestation of the identity of the Member States and their cultures and as part of the common cultural heritage."

The Intergovernmental Conference adopted, not an addition to Article F of the fundamental rights, as suggested by the four member countries, but a "declaration to be inserted into the final act" :

(declaration 11)

*"The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of the churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States".*

But for good measure and to avoid any indignant reactions, there was an addition to the declaration:

*"The Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations".*

- **Third step**

President Prodi creates the GOPA (Group of policy advisors to the President), a team of diplomats, charged with the regulation of the future relations between the Churches and the European Institutions.

The GOPA asked certain Churches to submit, before the end of June 2002, proposals in order to establish "a structured dialogue between the Churches, religious communities and the European Commission".

In June 2002, the response of the COMECE and of the KEK was addressed to Dr. Weninger of the GOPA. The objective of the Churches, in this document (COMECE /KEK of June 2002), is very precise and aims at organising :

A pre-legislative consultation procedure by seminars with policy advisors to the President of the Commission.

Regular working sessions on specific objectives set up on issues about which the Churches have a particular concern or an interest in draft legislation.

Occasional presidential-level meetings between the President of the European Commission and high level representatives of the Churches.

A liaison office within the services of the Commission, in order to develop a "partnership" with the Commission.

This text allows one to understand the sense of the word "dialogue " used in Article 51.

Article 51 : Status of churches and non-confessional organisations

1. The European Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The European Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain a regular dialogue with these churches and organisations,

It institutionalises the right for Churches to interfere in the institutions of the Union and answers the request of the Vatican of 1996. With Article 51, the Churches demand the creation in the European Union of a situation similar to the one enjoyed by the Vatican in the United Nations.

When this article would be accepted it would only be a matter of time for the first direct and official interventions of the churches in the Union's politics concerning several topics of the social life like IVF, euthanasia, contraception, family issues, the situation of women, biomedicine researches, divorce, education,....

Only the neutrality of the State with regard to spiritual beliefs and commitments is the guarantee of religious freedom and of freedom of thought. No Church and no religious group is entitled to impose its own conceptions upon the whole of society.

That is why numerous individuals as well as more than 200 religious, pluralist and humanist organisations demand that Article 51 be deleted.

2004

February