

## EUROPEAN HUMANIST FEDERATION

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2010

#### REPORT ON ACTIVITY 2009/10

*This report covers the period from March 2009 to March 2010*

#### **Introduction**

This has been the first year in which we have had the support of the international unit of Centre d'Action Laïque (Belgium) but without the loan of a specific member of their staff - and without an EHF general secretary. CAL's support has proved invaluable and the EHF has continued despite its minimal resources to support with growing effect the cause of secularism in the European institutions.

The report covers (1) external campaigning work, (2) promoting the visibility of Humanism and Secularism in Europe, and (3) management and development.

#### **1. External Campaigning Work**

As before, we have concentrated our campaigning work on the European institutions but have also included work at the national level both within and outside Europe.

##### ***(a) EU Commission***

#### **Article 17**

On 1 December 2009 the Lisbon Treaty was finally ratified and came into force. The Treaty includes the EU's commitment to 'transparent, open and regular dialogue' with the churches that they had lobbied for assiduously for at least 15 years. The Catholic bishops greeted it as '*an instrument that will enable them to more effectively support the EU*' so that it can be shaped to conform to their values, and looked forward to the dialogue being '*intensified and deepened*', to which end '*COMECE will soon with its ecumenical partners of the KEK (Conference of European Churches) concrete proposals to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council in order to get this dialogue in an institutional practice regularly*'. This reflects the remarks of the COMECE president in November 2007 who, after listing all the meetings and conferences and consultations they already had with EU institutions at the highest levels, said: "These talks are indeed necessary but they alone are in our view not enough to satisfy the offer of an open, transparent and regular dialogue".

Article 17 applies equally, of course, to ourselves as a 'philosophical and non-confessional organisation' - but our challenge is now to ensure that the churches - and other religious groups - do not by their superior organisation, connections and wealth ride roughshod over the interests of the huge non-religious minority in Europe.

History does not suggest this will be easy. Our efforts to be invited to the annual meeting with leaders of several different religions that the Presidents of the EU Commission and Parliament have been holding for five years once again failed in 2009. Our letter to the Presidents of the EU Council, Parliament and Commission received no reply. When we found out that 20 senior Christians, Jews and Moslems had been invited to a meeting on May 11 to be chaired by the President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and the President of the Parliament, Hans Gert Pöttering, we responded with a vigorous letter to all concerned registering 'the strongest possible protest' at our exclusion.

'The dialogue with the religions' (we said) 'is indeed regular. It is not transparent, given that no official transcript is published. It is most certainly not open. The Commission's website states: "Open means that anyone who wishes to take part in the Dialogue can do so." Yet the EHF has now for the third year asked to take part and each time has been ignored or refused. This failure to invite us to take part - this denial to the non-religious people of Europe of representation at this top-level meeting, devoted this year to the question of ethics and economics, - is a blatant act of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief. The European Union is supposed to be committed to non-discrimination but once again this is shown to be a pretence.'

Our protests were ignored, and an approach to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency about the unequal treatment we receive got a friendly reply that stated that the topic lay outside the Agency's terms of reference.

Meantime an earlier protest at threats to the secular nature of the EU had brought us a reply from the Commission accusing us of merely 'articulating our views on religion', as if seeking to protect secular institutions was a critique of religion. We sent a vigorous reply in April 2009 stating the many reasons for distrust of church lobbying in the EU, from the introduction of the Amsterdam Declaration without any consultation to the dissatisfaction already referred to of the Catholic bishops with the special treatment they already receive. We listed our many positive contributions to EU business from submissions about social matters during discussion of the draft constitution through our contributions to the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty - the book *The European Dream* & the Brussels Declaration articulating the proper nature of a liberal and secular society - to more recently our work on human rights, on intercultural dialogue, and in response to EU consultations on diverse matters including non-discrimination, schools & broadcasting. We ended by re-affirming our wish to continue to contribute positively.

In June the EHF and some other 'non-confessional' organisations - largely secularist Masonic lodges from several countries and Masonic human rights bodies - were invited to a working lunch with President Barroso and President Pötering at the Berlaymont building in Brussels. There was no preparatory work or agenda and indeed no advance notification of who would be present. Discussion was unsurprisingly platitudinous, but our representatives made some strong points about economic and social rights and about the failure of some EU member states - we instanced Lithuania which was at the time passing a homophobic law - to respect human rights. We saw the lunch as a largely political act by the Commission to seek cheaply to balance the number of occasions they have meetings with religious leaders.

When, therefore, the Lisbon Treaty came into effect, we sought to make a new start. We wrote to President Barroso pointing out that the dialogue was no longer discretionary but mandated by the Treaty. We wrote:-

It appears important to us, therefore, that the Treaty-mandated dialogue between the Union and the organisations representing the religious and non-religious populations of Europe should be conducted from the start on a non-discriminatory basis. This is a principle that I am sure you would endorse. It must mean, as you will agree, that organisations should be admitted to and participate in the dialogue on the basis of non-discriminatory criteria that do not include (save in extreme cases) the substance of their beliefs.

Plainly the principle not only allows but requires meetings between representatives of the Union and bodies representing a single religion or non-religious lifestance, so long as they do not in aggregate show undue favour to any particular belief. However, in our view the principle also entails that great care is necessary when the EU invites representatives from a range of beliefs to prestigious high-level meetings. In such cases, a non-discriminatory approach must require that those, such as the European Humanist Federation, that

represent non-religious beliefs should be included. The position of minority non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism should also be considered, albeit they are numerically less significant, whereas the non-religious population, of whose interests (I think you will agree) we are the most obviously representative organisation, make up perhaps one in three of the population of Europe.

We ended by stressing the positive contribution we could make. We copied our letter widely to MEPs and to European organisations representing Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. At the time of writing this approach has received no substantive reply.

#### Fundamental Rights Agency

We maintained our support of the Fundamental Rights Agency's NGO Platform. Rob Buitenweg attended a meeting in Vienna along with representatives of many other organisations. Discussion covered priorities for the Agency, and Rob stressed social and economic rights and freedom of expression as priorities. We have now nominated Hans Cars from Sweden, who conveniently lives in Vienna, to succeed Rob and have nominated him as a member of the NGO Advisory Panel. [UPDATE FOLLOWING ELECTION 15-16 APRIL]

#### ***(b) EU Council of Ministers***

In October we wrote to each of the 27 EU Heads of Government asking them to oppose the candidacy of Tony Blair as permanent president of the EU Council of Ministers under the Lisbon Treaty because of his prejudice against non-religious beliefs and secularists. The letter quoted him as endorsing the Pope's view that 'humanism devoid of Faith [is an] "inhuman humanism" ' and as claiming in a recent speech that 'We face an aggressive secular attack from without. We face the threat of extremism from within' and equating 'those who scorn God and those who do violence in God's name'. We were pleased that he was not appointed but doubt the influence of our approach.

Although the Lisbon Treaty introduces a (semi-)permanent President of the EU Council of Ministers, it does not abolish the revolving six-monthly national presidencies. In March 2010, therefore, we wrote to the current (Spanish) and successor (Belgian and Hungarian) revolving presidencies as well as to Mr Herman van Rompuy, the permanent president, referring to 'the habit has arisen of each successive Council Presidency holding an exclusive meeting with representatives of the two conferences of bishops of the Christian churches' and said:

We believe that the message given by these exclusive meetings is that the Christian churches hold a privileged place in the European Union. . . We ask that you invite the EHF also to meet representatives of the Spanish Presidency, so that we may put to you our deeply held views on some of the priorities for the EU. We believe that this would show that the Presidency recognised that the Lisbon Treaty, now at length ratified, requires even-handed treatment of the bodies representing religious and the non-religious people of the Union and that the Council values the contribution to the EU and to society at large of its large non-religious population.

We received a friendly reply from an official in Mr Van Rompuy's secretariat who wrote in reply to a follow-up letter correcting some misapprehensions: 'I am still puzzling through what happened in the past, so I'm grateful to have your perspective. For the future, the President is determined that there should be equal treatment between the religious groups and non-religious groups.'

Replies had not been received at the time of writing from Spain, Belgium or Hungary.

### ***(c) European Parliament***

Election In advance of the European Parliament elections of June 2009 we circulated to Member Organisations a draft memorandum suitable for sending to parties and candidates, and we published a briefing on separation of religion and politics with a request to members and supporters to write to their candidates in the election.

Letter to President In August 2009 we wrote to the new President of the Parliament, Mr Jerzy Buzek, after he had spoken about his wish 'to deepen dialogue with Europe's Christian churches'. We copied this letter to a number of MEPs. He replied with predictable assurances.

Platform for Secularism in Politics The previous Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics reformed itself after the election with a new name: the European Parliamentary Platform for Secularism in Politics (EPPSP) and has held bi-monthly meetings since September, all with contributions from EHF representatives. The EPPSP has appointed an Advisory Board of NGOs (which includes religious organisations that favour secularism) and the EHF took a leading role in its first meeting.

Lautsi v Italy In November the European Court of Human Rights delivered a judgement of potentially huge significance to secularism by ruling on human rights grounds against Italy's law requiring state schools to display crucifixes in every classroom. The case is subject to an appeal which will be heard in June 2010. Meantime it excited strong reactions from conservative forces across Europe and an immense campaign was mounted against the judgement. The EHF produced and circulated an English translation of the judgement, which was given in French. We wrote to the Socialist Group in the European Parliament deploring a resolution they tabled seeking to undermine the judgement with talk of subsidiarity and the rights of majorities to impose their views against the human rights of minorities (the resolution was subsequently withdrawn) and we worked hard through our members to press MEPs to sign a declaration in support of the judgement produced by Sophie in't Veld, the chair of the EPPSP.

Lobby In January 2010 we organised for the first time a lobby of the European Parliament. The complex task of organising the meetings was undertaken for us by the international unit of the Centre d'Action Laïque in Brussels. Ten people from ten EHF member organisations in seven countries spent two days at the Parliament. With additional meetings on other days we saw 17 MEPs and the assistants to two others. The MEPs came from eleven countries and four political groups. Some were old friends and received us warmly but all of them were interested in what we had to say and many expressed some agreement with us.

Typically three of us met each MEP and we raised issues including

- the unfair operation of the dialogue under Article 17, which is heavily biased towards religion;
- the need for the EU to take steps to safeguard civil liberties in its own member states if it is going to preach human rights to third countries;
- the way the churches, fast losing members across Europe, are resisting the loss of their privileges by painting themselves as victims of "Christianophobia"; and
- the dangers of creationism.

We followed up the meetings with letters and information and we copied to them the letter we later sent to President Barroso (see above).

### ***(d) Council of Europe***

Humanism is represented at the Council of Europe by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) but

under our agreement with IHEU we nominate one of their representatives. For the past year this has been Andrew Copson. He took a full part in the Conference of NGOs that accompanied the meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly - IHEU was at the Culture, Science and Education Committee, the Human Rights Committee, the Civil Society and Democracy Committee, the working group on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, and the task force on health and education (his full report is on our website) Later in the June 2009 he took part for EHF in the latest exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural education on the theme 'Teaching religious and convictional facts – a tool for acquiring knowledge about religions and beliefs in education: a contribution to education for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue'. Andrew's report of the meeting is on our website: he found it more productive than the previous year's event but 'still too general and not sufficiently focussed on practical implementation of initiatives'.

#### ***(e) Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe***

Vera Pegna continued her valuable work as our representative with OSCE, not only at meetings but maintaining contacts with key staff. However, she plans to make 2010 her last year in this role, and we have been pleased to find in Hans Cars from Sweden a well qualified successor.

Special Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Vienna The OSCE held a special conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Vienna in July 2009 - in part a result of EHF's representations. Our representative was Vera Pegna.

Ahead of the meeting OSCE invited recommendations from Civil Society organisations. Five EHF members filed recommendations and the EHF itself filed three recommendations (only five religiously-connected NGOs made submissions). Vera Pegna was asked to deliver one of the introductory speeches at a preliminary meeting - the first time that OSCE had asked a humanist and non-believer to open a meeting. EHF also held its own side-event on 'Secularism and the Rule of Law are a guarantee for freedom of religion or belief'.

All 56 OSCE member states were present as well as 85 NGOs. Of these around 40 were in some way connected to a religion and three to humanism - EHF, the British Humanist Association (Andrew Copson) and the Centre d'Action Laïque, Belgium (Catherine Lützel). Vera Pegna intervened in all three general sessions, once to deplore the Irish blasphemy law, once on concordats and once on the need to cater for secular funerals and burials. She provoked weak replies from the Irish delegation (the new law was better than the previous one because it did not prescribe imprisonment) and the Holy See (that 'international treaties' - not concordats! - were necessary for the Catholic church but carried no privileges!)

However, two alarming claims emerged clearly from religiously-oriented speakers and organisations: that defamation of religion should be punished by law and that conscientious objection on religious grounds should automatically become legal.

ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting: Warsaw For the annual meeting in September 2009 in Warsaw Vera was joined by David Pollock, Staffan Gunnarson and Pierre-Arnaud Perrouy. We held a successful side meeting at which David Pollock spoke on the question of legal exemptions from laws and duties for those with religious objections. We held conversations with diplomats and other NGOs and took an active part in a meeting reviewing the OSCE's *Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Religion or Belief*, on which we later made a written submission.

#### ***(f) Work at the National Level and Other Campaigning Work***

##### Application to UN for Accreditation

With IHEU's encouragement we applied in May 2009 to the UN for accreditation as an NGO so as to be able to

send representatives to the Human Rights Council and so assist the vital work being done there by IHEU and a few other bodies in resisting the persistent attempts by the OIC to introduce an offence of 'defamation of religion'. The application is finally due to be considered in May 2010.

#### Other interventions

We took up a number of issues with governments within and outside Europe during the year:

- We wrote to the President of Lithuania in June 2009 asking him to veto an act passed by the Lithuanian parliament that classed information about lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships as a danger to minors and limited its dissemination. We alerted our member organisations and supporters and about a dozen of them also wrote to Mr Adamkus. The President did veto the law, but in July the Parliament overruled the veto.
- We sent urgent protests to the Justice and Foreign Ministers of Ireland in July 2009 against a new blasphemy law that could only give comfort to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (see below). The law makes it a crime to publish or say anything that is 'grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion'. We appealed for Member Organisations and supporters to send similar appeals.
- Also in July we wrote to President Medvedev of Russia (and asked our members to do the same) to protest at the prosecution of art critic and gallery director Andrei Yerofeev and the former museum director Yuri Samodurov for 'incitement of hatred or enmity and denigration of human dignity' - actually for organizing in March 2007 a modern art exhibition, Forbidden Art 2006.
- In October, Vera Pegna spoke on behalf of the EHF at Forum "Laïcité 2010" in Paris, talking about the new rights of the churches in the European Union.
- In November we appealed to the head of the Iranian judiciary for clemency for a Kurdish Iranian but, appallingly, appeals by us and many others were ignored: Esan Fattahian was hanged on 11 November for apostasy and being an 'enemy of God'. His real crime seems to have been membership of a Kurdish opposition group. Fattahian had been tortured for three months.
- The same month we supported and urged Member Organisations to support a joint statement by NGOs against the annual resolution at the UN Human Rights Council from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference calling for criminalisation of 'defamation of religion'.
- In December we wrote to the Governor of Haryana state in India appealing for help to end the harassment by Brahmin neighbours of Swami Manavatavadi's International School of Humanitarian Thoughts and Practice, a secular humanist institute and IHEU member dedicated to the education and rehabilitation of street children, orphans, dalits and destitute women.
- In January we asked member organisations and supporters to write to members of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly asking them to support two progressive reports on abortion law.
- In February we wrote to the Prime Minister of Greece protesting about threats to a human rights organisation, the Greek Helsinki Monitor, by a government minister speaking in the Greek parliament. We copied our letter widely. The Greek Helsinki Monitor has successfully taken many cases against Greece to the European Court of Human Rights, including several related to secularist concerns. It is currently backing cases by several parents seeking to apply the Lautsi judgement in Greek schools. It

is run by Panayote Dimitras, who spoke at our conference in Athens in 2008 and is closely involved in running the Humanist Union of Greece, formed in January 2010.

- Also in February we gave our support to a joint appeal by many NGOs for procedural reform of the European Court of Human Rights. Some reforms were later adopted.
- In March we wrote to the prosecution service in Poland deploring a proposal to revive a previously rejected prosecution of the artist Dorota Nieznalska for 'offending religious beliefs'.
- The same month we wrote to the Vice-President (acting President) of Nigeria appealing for an end to the harassment of Leo Igwe, IHEU's west Africa representative, by local police in collaboration with the family of a man Igwe has accused of child rape.
- In April we signed and asked member organisations to add their names to a letter to the governments of Poland, Malta, Cyprus and Ireland calling for a right to abortion for all women in Europe. This joint initiative of NGOs from these countries together with the European Women's Lobby was supported by a march in Brussels on April 1.

EHF President David Pollock was among the many speakers at a rally in Hyde Park, London, in November 2009 protesting against the spread of sharia law. He picked out two reasons for opposing it: first, that it was undemocratic and unable to be revised; second, that the demand for it was based on the idea of group rights, which were hostile to individual human rights: in fact, sharia operated as a way to keep ordinary Muslims under the control of unrepresentative religious "community leaders".

The EHF President spoke at another London demonstration in February, this time a protest against Vatican interference in politics and in favour of a secular Europe. The demonstration supported a simultaneous larger demonstration in Italy.

## **2. Promoting the Visibility of Humanism and Secularism in Europe**

### **(a) Website**

David Pollock has continued to edit and update the website, while Rudy Machiels has taken over from Michel Bernair as our technical assistant and has produced a more attractive and exciting design with many additional features which we hope will 'go live' in the near future. It will use Google to translate the site automatically (if not always reliably) into any language at the click of a button. It will incorporate forums to replace the Yahoo forums for members and for general supporters. And there will be pages on every country in Europe including pages for news from Member Organisations.

### **(b) Leaflet**

A general leaflet about the EHF designed to inform and to recruit members has been produced. This leaflet is in English, but it is hoped that versions in different languages will be produced in due course.

### **(c) Conferences and Meetings**

Meeting on Rule of Law and on Education We held a valuable half-day meeting in London on 5 June 2009 before our General Assembly at which Vera Pegna spoke on the rule of law, introducing the EHF's new policy, before two sessions on education. John Keast, an advisor to the British government on education about lifestances and ethics, spoke on 'The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education' and three Board members spoke:

- Werner Schultz about the successful campaign to defend Berlin's ethics classes for all (with optional supplementary confessional classes) against a church campaign to make ethics one option alongside confessional religious classes;
- Tryntsje de Groot about teaching of humanist ethics in the Netherlands; and
- Luc Devuyt about Moral Education in Belgium, especially in Flanders.

Conference on Darwin, Humanism and Science Our one-day conference following the General Assembly in 2009 was held in collaboration with IHEU, the British Humanist Association and the South Place Ethical Society. Every seat was taken to hear from a platform of distinguished speakers. Professor Richard Dawkins started the day with an address on Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. He was followed by Professor Charles Susanne of the Free University of Brussels on threats to the teaching of evolution in European schools and by James Williams, from the University of Sussex, on 'Insidious Creationism: the intellectual abuse of children through creationist books, comics and literature'. Johan De Smedt, of the University of Ghent, spoke on the cognitive biases that impede our acceptance of evolutionary theory, and Dr Michael Schmidt-Salomon, from the Giordano-Bruno Foundation, Germany, on how to cope with the so-called 'moral' arguments against evolution. Babu Gogineni (IHEU) spoke on 'Hinduism and the Myth of Evolution', and the day ended with Professor A C Grayling, of Birkbeck College, London, on Humanism and Science.

Co-sponsored Conferences in Berlin In July, in cooperation with HVD (Germany) and UVV (Belgium), we organised a congress in Berlin on "Humanism – Education for freedom and social responsibility".

Immediately following this, in cooperation with HVD (Germany), UVV (Belgium) and European Humanist Professionals (EHP) we organised a congress in Berlin on "Humanism and Gender".

Thinking freely about Europe These monthly lunch-debates continued through the year. This is a cultural club recognised by the European Commission and supported by EHF that 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.

Conference on Children's Rights Plans to hold a conference on children's rights with support from the European Commission, agreed in principle over a year ago, have made no progress as the Commission has been unable to find a suitable date to offer us. We have a draft programme and ideas for speakers and still hope to go ahead.

### **3. Management and Development of EHF**

Board The Board of Directors met five times :

- on 4 and 5 June 2009 in London, hosted by the British Humanist Association
- on 26 October 2009, in Brussels, hosted by the Centre d'Action Laïque
- on 16 January 2010, in Brussels, hosted by the Centre d'Action Laïque
- on 17 April 2010, in Lucca, hosted by the Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti - an inquorate meeting owing to the suspension of air travel following the eruption of the Icelandic volcano.

The current composition of the Board is as follows:

President: David Pollock (United Kingdom)

Vice-Presidents: Staffan Gunnarson (Sweden) and Julien Houben (Italy)

Treasurer: Suzy Mommaerts (Belgium)

Members: Jean de Brueker (Belgium); Rob Buitenweg (Netherlands); Andrew Copson (United Kingdom); Luc Devuyst (Belgium); Pierre Galand (Belgium); Tryntsje de Groot (Netherlands); Marianne Marchand (Belgium); Werner Schultz (Germany); Baard Thalberg (Norway).

Finance Our efforts to increase our financial resources have not met with success. We have not found any suitable grant scheme from the EU or elsewhere to assist us (although we drew to the attention of member organisations one EU funding scheme that might have been of interest). As a result we continue to rely on subscriptions and donations from member organisations and individuals. In 2009, however, member organisations were exceptionally slow to pay their subscriptions, and the individual membership scheme attracted only a handful of members.

As the accounts to be submitted to the General Assembly show, both income and expenditure were lower in 2009 than in 2008. The reduction in income of is entirely the result of non-payment of subscriptions by member organisations and will, we hope, be largely made up during 2010, since we attribute the non-payment in part to our own failure to chase organisations. It is, however, disappointing that such an effort should be necessary in the first place. The consequent reduction in expenditure is spread across a number of headings.

Membership We ended the year with 42 member organisations of which 27 were full members and the remainder consultative. Some, however, are on the brink of being discounted as members, having failed for two years or more to pay their subscriptions. Moreover, although some member organisations are engaged and enthusiastic contributors to our work, others - including some well established and adequately financed ones - fail not only to pay their subscriptions but even to respond to requests for their basic contact details. One or two even fail to join the Yahoo group through which all our communications with members are conducted. It is an important task for the EHF in future to enthuse such members and demonstrate to them the value of the work we are doing.

We are aware of many other organisations in Europe that are eligible for membership, and one of the priority tasks when we again have some additional capacity is to make the case for membership to these organisations. So far work on recruiting new member organisations has also been minimal, but we have agreed a scheme of introductory subscription rates with the aim of encouraging new organisations that are currently lacking in resources to join.

In addition we have a small number of individual (supporting) members.

Yahoo Groups We have continued to use our Yahoo groups - ehffhe-info for supporters and the ehffhemo for Member Organisations - to distribute information about our work, with administrative matters and reports of board meetings on the member organisations' forum and reports on activities and correspondence on the Info forum, although the latter are increasingly posted to the website. Increasingly the Info group also provides a forum for supporters to discuss topics of interest. We hope that these forums will shortly be incorporated within the EHF website (see above).

Liaison with IHEU We have had three meetings with representatives of IHEU during the year to maintain good communications and ensure cooperation.

Lack of resources Despite the efforts of a small number of invaluable volunteers and the generous assistance

of the Centre d'Action Laïque we lack people to undertake work for us. The database on relations between church and state in each country of Europe has not been expanded and policy development has seen no advance. Nothing has been done to put into effect the idea of encouraging Member Organisations to share with us policy positions that they have developed and research that they have undertaken, so that we can make use of the work they have done and share it with other Member Organisations. Little or nothing has been done in the way of collaborative work with or between member organisations.

One or two Member Organisations have informed us of developments in their countries that affect the rights of unbelievers and humanists for good or bad, but most of this information has come instead from web-based intelligence services. The idea of creating a register of sympathetic people who have particular expertise in social, political, educational, cultural and other relevant domains on whom we can call as necessary remains just an idea.

In short, while we can continue to run the present activities of the EHF in a moderately acceptable way, we need more activists with a primary interest in the EHF rather than their own domestic affairs if we are to exploit the opportunities that are open to us.

28 April 2010