

## Annual Report 2012

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This report covers the period from May 2012 to May 2013 under three headings:

- (1) external campaigning work
- (2) promoting the visibility of Humanism and Secularism in Europe
- (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

##### Meeting with the DG Justice on conflicts of rights within the European Union, (4 June)

The EHF met with the DG justice to talk about religious exemptions in EU anti-discriminations directive. 2 experts were with the EHF delegation. The DG justice proposed the EHF to share information about cases of abusive recourse to religious exemptions in EU Member States for a EU report planned for 2014.

##### European External Action Service: Contribution to Guidelines on Freedom of Religion and Beliefs (FoRB) (19 October 2012 and 27 March 2013)

The European External Action Service realized that EU public servants and delegations could have difficulties dealing with religion and religious issues all over the world. It has therefore decided to create guidelines to promote freedom of religion and beliefs for the EU external action. The EHF met together with churches representatives (Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Protestant) and EEAS representatives to discuss the content of these guidelines.

Among other things, the EHF underlined the necessity to effectively include the right to change one's belief and to hold no belief. We also focused on the necessity for the EU to request the suppression of blasphemy laws abroad. We said that the document should include the right to criticize religious and philosophical dogma so that to respect freedom of expression.

We were satisfied to see that both meetings were held on a good secular approach (the guidelines included the defense of non-religious beliefs, asked for the abolition of blasphemy laws etc.)

### Opposition to Tonio Borg's designation as European Commissioner (October / November 2012)

In October 2012, Malta chose one of its most conservative politicians as candidate for the Health portfolio in the European Commission. Raphael Vassallo, Vice- President of the Malta Humanist Association and journalist in Malta, helped the EHF very much in its action against Tonio Borg's nomination. The EHF first wrote to President Barroso (see [EHF website](#)), then lobbied MEPs together with many NGOs (LGBT, feminist NGOs, Catholics for Choice, ENAR) in the perspective of the vote on Tonio Borg's appointment by the European Parliament (see [EHF website](#)). Tonio Borg was eventually confirmed but he will definitely be closely watched by MEPs and NGOs. During this action, the EHF made very good contacts with MEPs from different political groups and NGOs.



### Decision of the European Ombudsman to our complaint against the European Commission (25 January 2013)

On 18 October 2011, the EHF submitted a complaint to the European Ombudsman arguing that the European Commission was refusing to comply with the Article 17:3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) which requires the EU to conduct a *“regular, open and transparent dialogue with churches, religious communities as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations.”*

A few month earlier, in March 2011, the EHF had proposed a dialogue seminar to discuss the problems arising from religious exemptions in EU directives against discriminations but the Commission refused to discuss the subject on the grounds that it was going *“beyond the spirit of Article 17”*. The EHF made several attempts to obtain a shift in the Commission's position, culminating in a letter to President Barroso, which produced no result. The EHF was left with no other choice than lodging a complaint to the EU ombudsman, Mr Nikiforos Diamandouros.

In the decision closing his inquiry published on 25 January 2013, the EU ombudsman agreed with the European Humanist Federation. His letter states that *“the Commission failed properly to implement Article 17 (3) TFEU (which) constitutes an instance of maladministration”*. Beyond this specific case, the EHF was seeking to obtain from the EU Commission clear guidelines on how they intend to implement Article 17. Following EHF's view, the EU ombudsman inserted a further remark in his decision: *“taking into account the Ombudsman's findings, the Commission should clarify its practices and rules in this area, and, if necessary draw up guidelines indicating how exactly it plans to implement Article 17 TFEU.”*

The EHF welcomed the EU ombudsman's decision and will pay attention to the way the European Commission effectively follows up the Ombudsman's decision.

### Dialogue seminar on populism in Europe at the European Commission (15 May 2013)

This event was organized to confront European decision- makers with the rise of populisms in Europe and question them about a possible European strategy to fight it. This meeting was organized jointly with the Institut Maçonnique Européen de la Grande Loge Féminine de France and gathered MEPs, European Commission experts, researchers and civil society representatives. Discussions were reported on the EHF website.

## (b) EU Council of Ministers

- Meeting with Cypriot Presidency (6 November 2012)

The EHF met with the Cypriot Deputy Permanent Representative on 6 November (Cyprus received the churches a month before). The EHF presented a briefing note to share its views on several topics (guidelines on Freedom of religion and belief, research on the human embryo, Cypriot abortion laws, EU anti-discrimination directive, nomination of Tonio Borg as Commissioner for Health and Consumers). The briefing note was posted on the [EHF website](#).

- Irish Council Presidency

The EHF then wrote to the Irish Council Presidency saying that if the churches were to be received, the EHF should be so as to implement Article 17 TFEU in a non-discriminatory way. The Irish Council Presidency acknowledged reception and said that our point “had been noted”. A churches delegation was received on 8 March 2013 but the EHF received no invitation. We therefore wrote twice to the Irish Taoiseach to complain about this discriminatory treatment and urge his Presidency to receive us as soon as possible before May 24.

In the meantime, we prepared a briefing note on several European and Irish topics we wanted to bring to his attention. Among them, the necessity to suppress the Irish blasphemy law and to decriminalize abortion in Ireland.

## (c) European Parliament

### EHF lobbying campaign on research policy

From May 2012 onwards, the EHF has launched a major campaign to remove religious restrictions from EU policy on research. European institutions are currently negotiating the Commission’s new proposal “[Horizon 2020](#)” which will set the rules for European Union (EU) funding for research in Europe for the rest of the decade. Like previous programmes, “Horizon 2020” raises ethical issues (article 16), one of which is the European funding for human embryonic stem cell (hESC) research.



**Keep Dogma Out of Stem  
Cell Research**

Several religious organisations have been influencing EU decision-makers to stop this funding on the ground that this research would be “contrary to human dignity”. Deeply attached to freedom of research and medical progress, the EHF produced [two documents](#) to promote the reinforcement of this public funding for hESC research with the cooperation of many renowned scientists.

We also created a series of pedagogical videos to explain the usefulness of this research. These documents and videos – posted on the [EHF website](#) - have been sent to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who will decide whether to maintain this funding or not in the coming months.

During this campaign, we met several Belgian politicians involved in the negotiations and MEPs from different groups. Several of them welcomed our initiative and contacted us to get information on this topic. EHF Member organisations have also been very active in gathering scientists support and relaying EHF position.

We also organized a public hearing at the European Parliament in November 2012 which was well attended with a panel of high quality: Marc Tarabella (MEP), Pierre Galand (EHF President), Philippe Busquin (former EU Research Commissioner), Pierre Vanderhaegen (Belgian scientist) and Julian Hitchcock (British lawyer). You can read their interventions [here](#).

#### Article 17 TFEU : Meeting with European Parliament (14 November 2012)

Not only the Commission and Council but also the European Parliament is expected to implement dialogue under Article 17 TFEU.

On 14 November 2012, the European Parliament President met several representatives of churches and non-confessional organizations, including the European Humanist Federation (EHF) and the Belgian Centre d'Action Laïque (CAL) for a dialogue meeting on "intergenerational solidarity".

EHF President Pierre Galand took the opportunity to emphasize that solidarity between the generations was mostly "based on women". He also recalled that solidarity should "allow the old and the sick facing painful diseases to have the right to die with dignity and to fully exercise their right to euthanasia." The Deputy Secretary General of the CAL, Jean De Brueker, drew attention to the fact that the baby boomers who are now between 45 and 65 were "sandwiched between the needs of their aging parents and their children while they themselves were still in the workforce."

This meeting marked a new approach in the implementation of the dialogue under Article 17. So far, Parliament used to meet separately the churches and the non-confessional organizations. But for this first meeting organized under its authority, Martin Schulz, the President of Parliament, decided to invite believers, atheists and agnostics in a single meeting. On this occasion, Laszlo Surjan, Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of the implementation of the dialogue has explained how he intended to conduct exchanges during his term. "I would avoid direct opposition between the different organizations present because there is no point trying to convince each other but we should find a way to respect each other," he said.

Secular and humanist organizations acknowledged this declaration of intent, but several questions remain. The choice of the theme of the meeting is one of them. If Parliament's objective is to avoid polemical debates between believers and secularists, it is still essential to address topics that allow all participants to bring its added value in the discussions. In this vein, the choice of the theme of "intergenerational solidarity" left secular and humanist organizations skeptical about the real impact of the initiative. The discussions were limited to a round table giving four minutes speaking time for each participant in the wake of three presentations, certainly interesting but very distant from the primary concerns of the various organizations invited to the meeting .

For the European Humanist Federation and the Centre d'Action Laïque the initiative of the European Parliament is a step in the right direction, after the unfortunate experiences of recent years. But the path to a constructive dialogue will be long.

#### European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics

The EHF has continued to support the EPPSP and is a member of its Advisory Board. The Platform met 4 times this year on the several issues: assisted dying, the influence of religious and secular lobbies in the EU, the European funding of research on the human embryo and the freedom of religion in external EU policies.

It was decided to broaden the basis of MEPs support in the perspective of the next European elections. We therefore contacted several MEPs who could be interested in joining the Platform.

#### Other contacts

Separately from the Platform, the EHF maintains regular contacts with MEPs in the different political groups. This year, we have tried to contact MEPs from the European People's Party who are usually not very keen on supporting us.

#### Alliance for a Secular Europe

This network of organisations, set up at the beginning of 2011, provides the means to coordinate information and action in opposition to reactionary religious forces. It promises to be a useful initiative and now has over 80 organisations in membership but should ideally have many more. Administration of the Alliance is handled by the EHF on behalf of its sponsor, the EPPSP Advisory Board.

#### **(d) EU Presidents (Commission, Parliament and Council)**

On 27 Nov. 2012, EHF President Pierre Galand took part to the annual meeting between the three presidents of the European Union and leading non-confessional organisations in Europe. This year's topic was solidarity between generations.

The combined effect of longer life expectancy and economic and social crisis is putting a lot of pressure on many generations in Europe. The EHF stressed that women contribute a lot more than men to all forms of active solidarity without due recognition. In EHF's view, solidarity must be regarded as a policy rather than charity. Such policy could be guided by 3 principles: general approach (covering fields like work, housing, mobility, care, etc.), universality (all generations must be involved) and reciprocity (exchange between generations). To which non-confessional organization would like to add liberty as a guiding principle, understood as freedom of choice – to take part or not to such initiatives, to work or not after retirement, to terminate one's life in a dignified manner.



#### **(e) EU Fundamental Rights Agency**

Like previous years, the EHF ensured a monitoring of the FRA activity with its representative Hans Christian Cars.

#### **(f) Council of Europe**

We have continued to cooperate with the International Humanist and Ethical Union in representing Humanism at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

- General Assembly of INGO June 2012 and General Assembly of INGO January 2013, Strasbourg

EHF attended these meetings. It was the opportunity for humanists to be present after several years of absence. It was also a good opportunity to meet with Council of Europe authorities.

- Working groups on Human Rights and Religions, Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges, Strasbourg and Paris

EHF attended several meetings. It is really important for humanists to be there and contribute to these meetings since extremist Catholic groups are very active in these meetings. Hopefully, humanists were able to work with moderate religious groups and reports adopted were very satisfying. These reports should be published soon.

- Council of Europe INGO meeting: The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue, Conference at Durrës - 3-4 September 2012.

CAL attended as moderator and panellist. Except from the Catholic and Orthodox churches, participants agreed to say that religion and beliefs were private matters and that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the most important reference for young people. Many religious young people also expressed their opposition to the views of their own church's hierarchy (on gay marriage, freedom of expression for instance).

- European Local Democracy Week at the World Forum for Democracy- 5-11 October 2012.

EHF attended.

- Lisbon Conference on "The Arab Season: from change to challenges", 3-4 December 2012. Organized by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

This conference was also a good opportunity to reinforce EHF contacts and to have practical discussions with speakers.

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

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2012, the EHF and its Belgian member organisation, le Centre d'Action Laïque (CAL) attended the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), in Warsaw. HDIM, Europe's largest annual human rights and democracy conference, is organized every year by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as a platform for OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation, civil society, international organizations and OSCE structures to take stock of the implementation of the human dimension commitments, discuss associated challenges, share good practices and make recommendations for further improvements.

Hans Christian Cars represented the EHF and stressed the necessity for Member States to abolish blasphemy laws and to defend freedom of expression within certain limits (condemnation of hate speeches). Benoit Feyt spoke on behalf of the CAL and asked about the guidelines on freedom of religion and belief prepared by the OSCE and for which there had been no news. The EHF eventually learned that the guidelines may be not as balanced as it had hoped.

Their statements were posted on the [EHF website](#).

## **(g) Other Campaigning Work**

### Application to UN for Accreditation

Our application for accreditation to the United Nations (which would allow us to attend and speak at the Human Rights Council) reaches its fourth anniversary in May 2013 but continues to be blocked by Islamic countries which who raise large numbers of seemingly irrelevant questions at every meeting of the vetting committee. On 1 April 2013, we received notification that the application will be considered at the session on 20-29 May and 7 June 2013.

### Other statements and actions

- [EHF comments on Habib Kazdaghli's acquittal, 3 May 2013](#)
- [Joint letter with IHEU to call for a strong European action on Hungary](#) – for the attention of 3 EU Presidents, 19 March 2013
- [EHF President speaks on the Pope's legacy on Euronews](#), 13 February 2013
- [EHF comments on the Pope's resignation](#), 13 February 2013
- [EHF at the Russian Embassy in Brussels to support Russian LGBT community](#), 22 January 2013
- [EHF President speaks on French gay marriage debate](#), 14 January 2013
- [EHF and Greek Helsinki Monitor wrote to Greek Minister of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights about national blasphemy law](#), 23 July 2012

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

### **(a) Website, Facebook and leaflet**

This year, the EHF website was re-organised to make it more lively and attractive. On the web, we also launched an EHF Facebook page (more than 4400 followers across Europe) where we post Europe and EHF info everyday.

Finally, we also created, with the help of the Centre d'Action Laïque and "Bruxelles Laïque" (Belgium), a new EHF leaflet that can be downloaded here.

The objective of these changes was to make the EHF more dynamic on the web and attract a wider and younger audience.



### **(b) Newsletter**

We have published three issues of our new email Newsletter which is produced for us by the international unit of the Centre d'Action Laïque.

### (c) Conferences and Meetings

#### 2012 General Assembly and conference in Utrecht

We held a successful 2012 General Assembly in Utrecht (NL) at the University of Humanistic Studies. This GA was remarkably organized by Humanistisch Verbond and Humanistische Alliantie. Apart from regular administrative discussion, we had the great pleasure to welcome Katharina von Schnurbein from the European Commission who talked about the implementation of the dialogue between the European Commission and non-confessional organisations. At the Open meeting, we had also the opportunity to listen to several EHF member organisations which developed the work they have been doing at home. This has been the basis of great discussions about how EHF could be more visible and efficient at the European level. We then had an exciting conference on the theme of humanism and resilience with keynote speaker Pascal Bruckner and several workshop where we could go deeper in concrete discussions (e.g. on LGBT issues, on media). For our closing day, we had the chance to listen to MEP Sophie In't Veld who underlined the necessity for humanists to defend and promote their values at the European level. David Pollock also developed on the importance of the religious lobbying in the corridors of European institutions. Finally, participants gathered in small groups and came up with interesting concrete actions to reinforce our presence at the European level. These proposals have been shared with the participants.



### 3. Management and Development of EHF

#### Board

The Board of Directors met times: on 25 May 2012 after the General Assembly in Utrecht, on 17 September and 2 December 2012, on 11 March 2013 and on 23 May 2013 before the General Assembly in Bucharest.

At the 2012 General Assembly in Utrecht, Pierre Galand was elected EHF President and succeeded to David Pollock whom we warmly thank for all the energy he has dedicated to the EHF.

Were also elected as Board members: Staffan Gunnarson (Vice-president) - Jean De Brueker (Treasurer) - Renate Bauer - John Bishop – Rob Buitenweg – Hans Christian Cars- Remus Cernea – Pavan Dhaliwal – Marina van Haeren – Julien Houben – Massimo Redaelli – Werner Schultz – Baard Thalberg

At Board meeting of 25 May 2012, Renate Bauer and Staffan Gunnarson were nominated EHF Vice-Presidents and Jean De Brueker EHF Treasurer.

The current composition of the Board is therefore as follows:

*President:*

Pierre Galand, Centre d'Action Laïque, Belgium

*Vice-Presidents:*

Staffan Gunnarson (Humanisterna, Sweden)

Renate Bauer, Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften, Germany

*Treasurer:*

Jean de Brueker (Centre d'Action Laïque, Belgium)

*Members:*

Renate Bauer (Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften, Germany)

John Bishop, (Humanist Society of Scotland)

Rob Buitenweg (Humanistisch Verbond, Netherlands)

Hans Christian Cars (Humanisterna, Sweden)

Remus Cernea (Romanian Humanist Association)

Pavan Dhaliwal, (British Humanist Association)

Marina Van Haeren (Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen, Belgium)

Julien Houben (Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti, Italy)

Massimo Redaelli (UAAR)

Werner Schultz (Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands, Germany)

Baard Thalberg (Human-Etisk Forbund, Norway).

Administration

Following David Pollock's retirement from the position of EHF President, the International unit of the Centre d'Action Laïque (Belgium) has taken over most of his tasks.

EHF President's interventions abroad and visits to Member Organisations

- Paris, 9 November 2012 : meeting with Ligue de l'Enseignement
- Paris 11 April 2013, conference on "Laïcité, Laïcités, reconfigurations and new challenges", intervention on "Is there a room for secularism/humanism in the European political space?" organized by La Ligue de l'Enseignement.
- Amsterdam, 15 April 2013: meeting with Humanistisch Verbond to discuss their actions on the field.
- Italy, 21 April 2013, 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the "Journées de la laïcité" organized by « Iniziativa Laicia » at University of Modena. Intervention on "secularism in Europe". Meeting with UAAR.

Finance

EHF Accounts 2012

Our accounts for 2012 ended with a negative balance of 3,238.38€ while the budget projected a deficit - or more precisely the use of our financial reserves - up to 5,000€ which means that we managed to keep our accounts in the existing budgets. As it was the case for the previous years, our revenues depend exclusively on MO's contributions.

By principle we take into account the contributions made between January 1 and December 31. They may concern several accounting years, which explains the variations of amounts from year to year. For 2012, it is exclusively related to the performance fees. Almost all associations have made the payment scheduled. (A picture of the details of the contributions is attached to the 2012 financial statement.)

Spending

All expenditures match with the expected budget. The amount of basic operating costs are very limited, even more so when we ignore the non-recurring expenses for the website. The reason is that

the CAL directly assumes all charges generally related to the post in addition to the remuneration of the team doing most of EHF's work.

Expenses for the board represent the costs of travel and accommodation of some board members.

EHF finances the General Assembly to support the association organizing it. A specific point is dedicated to the costs of travel and accommodation for representatives of associations whose means are too limited to ensure the presence at the GA.

Other expense items are allocated to the various places of intervention of the EHF - such as EU parliament, Council of Europe, OSCE, European Council and Presidency - or to people asked by the EHF to defend its interests and ensure its participation at international meetings.

If our activities keep on growing, it seems obvious that we will have to diversify our financial resources. On the balance sheet, the relevant element is the amount of financial reserves: 61,269.43€ on December 31 2012.

### Membership

The EHF has continued to expand, with new 6 member organisations being approved at the General Assembly in 2012: Ateistisk Selskab (with which our existing member Humanistisk Debat has merged), Denmark; Humanismo Secular Portugal, Portugal; Freidenker-Vereinigung der Schweiz / Association Suisse des Libres Penseurs / Associazione Svizzera dei Liberi Pensatori, Switzerland; La Ligue de l'Enseignement, France; Atheist Union of Greece

New application for membership in 2013 from: ASUR / Romanian Secular-Humanist Association.

### Policy

The EHF adopted a new policy on populism in Europe. This has been made in the perspective of our dialogue seminar on populism with the European Commission held on 15 May 2013. Our position paper began with a brief statement of the rise of populisms in several EU countries (e.g. Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Hungary, Bulgaria). We then warned about the dangers of populisms (left and right) for national democracies and for the European project. We also called for a strong and coordinated action from the European Union to tackle these populist developments. According to us, this action needs to embrace different sub-actions: fighting against radicalization, diplomatic sanctions towards EU Member States which violate European principles (e. g. the rule of law), promotion of education and formation etc.

### Yahoo Groups

The EHF's two Yahoo groups have continued to function through the year, with the "Info" network seeing not only postings from the centre about EHF developments but also vigorous debate on a number of topics. The group is open to all members of our member organisations. The group for member organisations is used as the EHF's main channel of communication with its members and is open to all their staff and committee members. We wish to promote membership of both groups.