

## Why this colloquium

The European Humanist Federation was created 15 years ago –we will celebrate this event today at the evening dinner- with the aim to use the opportunity of the development of the union between most of the European countries to promote secularism in the European institutions under construction, and at the same time, in the member States.

Our goal was, and still is, to take profit of this exceptional situation of building a new co-operation between people in Europe, having different structures of government but facing the difficulty of finding a way of living together and in peace.

The many debates, agreements and compromises occurring during many years can provide the necessary facilities to introduce what we, as humanists and "laïques", consider as the best way to organise a peaceful multicultural and multi-convictions society, I mention secularism; in french "la laïcité" and in Spanish "la laicita de la sociedad".

Everybody here knows that secularism (laicita de la sociedad) will respect democratic convictions, whether they are based on religion or on humanism. Thus, a State and all official institutions need to be impartial with respect to all denominations, based or not on the believe on a god.

This is what the public Institutions are concerned with. But another important topic is dealing with the requirement of giving an equal consideration to atheists and agnostics, people not belonging to churches, that were in the past considered as heretics, and more generally, as people without morality and convictions.

To attain both objectives, a secular society and no discrimination against non believers, some conditions are required.

Briefly, I will mention what can be considered as the most important ones.

- To be organised as a responsible group

- To be visible in the society

- To be credible, i.e. to be able to propose valuable solutions to problems arising in the society.

That 's exactly what EHF is trying to do in the European Union, with the help of its member associations. This is also what most of its members are doing in their own countries.

Both actions are necessary to attain our common objectives, on a regional or national level and, at the same time, on a European level. If one side is lacking or failing, a success will also be lacking.

Recognised as an international and European NGO, EHF can help its members, and on the other hand, its members can detect discriminations and problems arising in their countries;

Subjects of interest are numerous.: participating democracy, equality between women and men, social questions, education and culture, ethical problems, citizenship, sustainable development, discrimination...

That's why a colloquium such as the one we will have today is so important for all of us, to determine the most important questions and problems in the different countries.

We did that in previous years in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, England, France, Italy and Norway (which doesn't belong to the EU). But to day , thanks to Europa Laica hospitality, we are in Spain.

I wish all of you a very interesting and fruitful symposium

Georges C. Liénard,  
general secretary