

REPORT ON ACTIVITY 2005

This report has been drawn up for the period going from March 2005 to March 2006.

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INTRODUCTION

The **Working Plan** adopted by the EHF General Assembly on 26 June 2005, in Berlin defines the **priorities for action for 2005-2006**, related to the defence of secularism and humanism as such :

- European Institutions
- Development of synergies for action with member organisations and IHEU
- Enhancement of EHF visibility and capacity for action

and the following **main fields for action** :

- Participative democracy
- Humanist life stance
- Development of the dialogue with the European Commission and Parliament
- EU Presidency
- Discrimination against non believers

Action has to be undertaken on two levels, EHF working on the level of the European Institutions

and member organisations dealing with the same subjects on the level of the European Union Member States.

MANAGEMENT OF EHF

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2005

The 2005 General Assembly was hosted by the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (HVD) (<http://www.humanismus.de/>, in Berlin, on 26 June 2005.

The GA accepted two new full member organisations : the Humanist Society of Scotland

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(<http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/>) and the Humanistisch Vrijzinnig Vormingswerk (Belgium) <http://www.vrijzinnighumanisme.be/>

The GA adopted unanimously the EHF bylaws that had been adapted in order to comply with the new Belgian law on non-profit organisations.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board met four times :

- twice in Berlin in June 2005 hosted by HVD
- on 29 October in Brussels hosted by Centre d'Action Laïque (<http://www.laicite.be>)
- on 11 February 2006 in Paris hosted by Ligue de l'Enseignement (<http://www.laligue.org/>).

Composition of the Board as of 26 June 2005 :

President : Steinar NILSEN (Norway)

First Vice-President : Vera Pegna (Italy)

Vice-President : Jean-Michel Ducomte (France)

Secretary General : Georges Liénard (Belgium)

Treasurer : Suzy Mommaerts (Belgium)

Members : Tryntsje de Groot (Netherlands)

Marianne Marchand (Belgium)

Werner Schultz (Germany)

EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

DRAFT EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION

Even though the draft European Constitutional Treaty was not adopted, the European Commission is implementing the Article 52, meeting regularly with Churches and listening to what they have to say as it has been common practice for years.

Humanists had always been excluded from dialoguing with the European Commission until this year when under the pressure from European Parliamentarians, a meeting was held

between the president of the Commission and representatives of EHF.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

President Barroso received an EHF delegation

On 9 November 2005, the president of the European Commission finally received a delegation from the European Humanist Federation in the building of the presidency in Brussels. For more than six years EHF worked to arrange such a meeting, but while religious representatives regularly met with the European Commission president, former president Romano Prodi in reality refused to meet EHF. This changed when José Manuel Barroso took

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office.

President Barroso started the meeting by informing the EHF delegation about the position of the European Union. No country can be admitted to the Union unless its citizens have free choice of life stance. However, the Union cannot do anything about privileges granted to specific religions, such as concordats, Christian object clauses in laws and similar. Such matters can only be dealt with at a national level.

President Barroso was informed about the objectives of EHF and was asked to ensure that the impartiality of the Institutions of the Union was respected. The delegation insisted that no discrimination be accepted, in particular against non believers and that they enjoy, in all the countries of the European Union, a consideration equal to the one granted to religious convictions.

EHF president Steinar Nilsen stressed the fact that polls show that from one third to one half of the population of Europe in reality has no religions life stance or world view, and that EHF is the only organisation on a European level that speaks for these people, which we do whether they are members or not.

The hour long meeting went in a friendly atmosphere, and resulted in a good dialogue and a very useful exchange of opinions. President Barroso seemed to value the information he received, and the meeting provided useful insights for the participants.

9 November 2005 - J.M. Barroso, EU president received an EHF delegation

[photo temporarily removed]

José Manuel Barroso, European Commission President and Steinar Nilsen, EHF President

[photo temporarily removed]

The EHF delegation : Tryntsje de Groot, Georges Liénard, Edith Nagant, Steinar Nilsen, Jean-Michel Ducomte, Suzy Mommaerts, Jenoff van Hulle, Claude Wachtelaer

Photos from the Audiovisual Library of the European Commission

BEPA (Bureau of European Policy advisers) (Ex-GOPA)

The GOPA became in 2005 the Bureau of European Policy Advisers. It is a department of the European Commission, reporting directly to the President and under his authority, providing professional and well-informed advice to the President and the Commissioners and formulating recommendations on issues regarding the policy of the EU. The activity of the BEPA is organised into three main policy areas: economic, societal, and political.

In the political area, the main items covered are, amongst others, external relations, EU institutional issues, trends in public opinion, trends in EU political forces, emerging actors in the world, dialogue with communities of faith and conviction. BEPA organises monthly debriefing meetings on different European subjects.

In 2005, EHF regularly attended the meetings it was invited to.

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End 2004, EHF had stopped getting invited to the briefing meetings but had learned that the Church of Scientology was. A statement “The European Commission invites the Church of Scientology and expels the humanists” had been issued largely circulated throughout the media and to European MP’s by humanist and friendly organisations in Europe. EHF also wrote to R. Prodi, ex-President of the Commission, and to the new president J.M.D. Barroso.

At least three written questions to the Parliament were presented by European MP's. On February 8 2005, President Barroso, on behalf of the Commission, replied that "... The Honourable Members may be correct in pointing out that on this occasion the meeting did not correspond to that ideal so, although the Constitutional Treaty is not yet in force, it is intended that during 2005 the Commission will establish procedures which match up to the spirit of the Article 52".

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

EHF took part in a survey "For diversity- Against Discrimination" on the European Commission Community Action programme to combat discrimination aiming at collecting opinions on the actions financed in the framework of the programme since 2001.

European Ombudsman

The office of European Ombudsman was established by the Maastricht Treaty as part of the citizenship of the European Union. The Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the activities of Community institutions and bodies.

With the approval of the European Parliament, the Ombudsman has defined "maladministration" in a way that includes respect for human rights, for the rule of law and for principles of good administration.

As well as responding to complaints from individuals, companies and associations, the Ombudsman works proactively, launching inquiries on his own initiative and reaching out to citizens to inform them about their rights and about how to exercise those rights.

<http://www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int/home/en/general.htm>

On 6 December 2005, EHF attended a workshop on invitation organised by the European Ombudsman. A leaflet on "The European Ombudsman : 10 years, 20 000 complaints – too many ? too few ? was distributed".

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

All-Party Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics

The "All Party Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics" (WP), set up end 2004, is an informal grouping of European parliamentarians, meeting regularly with members of civil society, with the aim of :

- Identifying issues of common interest in the field of religion/secularism and politics, primarily in the context of the European Union, but also at national and local level in Member States, when EU political values and principles are at stake;
- Taking action, where appropriate, to counter any attempts to undermine democracy, human rights and in particular women's rights and minority rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, pluralism and the rule of law."

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<http://www.politicsreligion.com/group.html>

The interest in the Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics has been continuously growing since its creation, with 20 MEPs having been personally involved and a number of others requesting information on the work of the group. The WG's main achievements have been :

- the request by the Parliament of a legal expertise on the impact of concordats on European legislation,
- a plenary debate on the relations between the European Commission and churches and nonconfessional organizations,
- the rejection by the Parliament, in second reading of an earmarking of EU funding for World Youth Day,
- the insertion on the agenda of the EP Conference of Presidents, for clarification, of the question of the appointment of MEP to the European Group on Ethics .

EHF attended all the 2005 meetings, provided information and presented several subjects for investigation and study, like the Buttiglione nomination, the exclusion of EHF from the GOPA (now BEPA) which lead to several parliamentary questions to the European Commission, the financing by the E.U. of the Catholic World Youth Days, the intervention of the churches in the E.U., concordats in Europe and more particularly the Slovak one, ...

Slovak concordat on conscientious objection

EHF had drawn the attention on the WG on the Slovak concordat with the Holy See, and asked them to examine the issue of concordats in Europe. The UE Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights, set up in 2002 by the European Commission upon request of the European Parliament, issued at the end of 2005, a document "Opinion N°4-2005 : The right to conscientious objection and the conclusion by EU Member States of concordats with the Holy See"

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/cfr_cdf/doc/avis/2005_4_en.pdf

Three questions were examined :

- Are such agreements between a State and the Holy See recognized a primacy above national law, including national Constitutions ?
- Do such agreements create an incompatibility with fundamental rights and the law of the European Union?
- By which means do such agreements produce effects and how are such agreements terminated ?

The opinion raised precise objections about the discriminations that this concordat would make against mainly women and non Catholics. The report has to be considered as a first important contribution for an in-depth process that ideally would lead to a large debate on European values.

One important objective achieved by the report is to have at last raised awareness and to have induced a broad public debate on concordats in Europe.

In Slovakia, the report has provoked much public debate too. The Christians Democrats left the government beginning of February and early elections were foreseen in Slovakia for June 2006.

EHF is pleased with this first and important result, obtained thanks to the tenacity of

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European parliamentarians attached to the principles of separation of Churches and States. The following steps will depend on the European Parliament as well as on the European Commission which declares it pursues the objective of eliminating any discrimination between citizens.

European subventions for the Catholic World Youth Days (WYD)

In December 2004, the European Parliament had voted against a 1,5 million euros subsidy for the Catholic WYD, in Cologne, in August 2005. This amount constituted 38 % of the budget the European Union allotted to the projects of all youth organisations together !

EHF and its member organisations had issued press releases and petitioned about this obvious discrimination. However the Commissioner in charge of Youth, Slovak Jan Figel, managed to have the then available 1,5 million euros granted to the WYD plus 250 000 euros obtained under a cultural budget line.

Drugs

EHF took part in the public hearing organised by the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee of the European Parliament on the evaluation of the "EU Strategy on fighting drugs (2005-2008), on 21 April 2005, in Brussels. The position of the Commission and of the European Parliament on drugs was under discussion. The document adopted at the EHF GA 2005 in Berlin "Let us regulate the sales of drugs" was distributed during the public hearing. EHF also participated to the press conference organised by the Luxembourg

Presidency of the EU.

Protest against an exhibition in the European Parliament comparing abortion with the Shoa

End November 2005, EHF signed and circulated to its member organisations and to humanists across Europe a letter addressed to Josep Borrell-Fontelles, President of the European Parliament protesting about an antiabortion exhibition in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, comparing abortion with the Shoa, organised by the ultraconservative and Eurosceptic party League of Polish Families and supported by the Polish Catholic church, the Polish Association for the Protection of Human Life and some Polish MEPs. Josep Borrell-Fontelles intervened to stop the exhibition.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a non-political body that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups, and others, a formal platform to express their points of views on EU issues. Its opinions are forwarded to the larger institutions - the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process. http://www.esc.eu.int/how/index_en.asp

A series of discussions has been organised by the Economic and Social Committee, in Brussels. The first discussion which took place on 10 March 2005, was introduced by Professor Krzysztof Michalski, Rector of the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna, and Professor of Philosophy at Boston University, who, at the request of the president of the

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European Commission, had in recent years headed the Reflection Group on the Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe.

ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

The OSCE is the largest regional security organization in the world. It conducts a wide range of activities related to all three dimensions of security — the human, the politico-military and the economic-environmental. <http://www.osce.org/>

The OSCE monitors and reports on the human rights situation in each of its 55 participating States. It responds to issues affecting the lives of individuals, helping to ensure that human rights are protected and taking active steps to combat racism, discrimination and related forms of intolerance.

2005 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – Warsaw

EHF sent quite a large delegation to the 2005 Human Rights Implementation Meeting, organised in Warsaw, from 19 to 30 September 2005. Representatives of European humanism from Belgium, Italy, and Poland, among whom the Vice-President V. Pegna and the Treasurer

S. Mommaerts of EHF, actively took part in the working sessions dealing with tolerance and non discrimination.

They presented interventions on concordats in Europe, on the monopoly of Churches on the Polish media, on discriminations against non believers in Italy, on the limits to the freedom of religion, of thought and of conscience. In order to avoid any discrimination against non believers who represent between 35 and 50 % of the European population, it was requested legal texts dealing with the freedom of religion also mention the freedom not to have a religion.

The texts are available on the EHF website.

Belgian Presidency of OSCE

Belgium holds the OSCE Chairmanship in 2006. A group of Flemish and French- speaking Belgian and international organisations working on themes or regions related to the OSCE, have established a coalition to support the Belgian Presidency with a critical viewpoint.

The members of the Coalition are : Caritas International, Coordination nationale d'action pour

la Paix et la Démocratie (CNAPD), Mouvement contre le racisme, antisémitisme et xenophobie (MRAX), Netwerk Rechtvaardigheid en Vrede (NRV), Pax Christi Vlaanderen (PCV), Vrede vzw and EHF.

Belgian Presidency website : <http://www.osce.org/cio>

Coalition website : <http://www.osce-ngo.be>

Memorandum to the Belgian Presidency

The coalition wrote a memorandum which was presented to the Belgian OSCE Presidency in which EHF had drawn up two texts : one on the traffic and use of drugs and one on the dialogue between life stances.

On 26 January 2006, the Coalition organised a press conference to present the memorandum to the media.

International NGO Conference

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The NGO coalition will set up an international conference to take place on 16 and 17 May 2006, in the prestigious Palais d'Egmont in Brussels.

EHF will take part in the organisation of two workshops : on drugs and on the dialogue between convictions.

Information available on the EHF website.

EUROPEAN CITIZEN ACTION SERVICES (ECAS)

ECAS was created in 1990 as an international non-profit organization, independent of political parties, commercial interests and the EU Institutions. Its mission is to enable NGOs and individuals to make their voice heard with the EU by providing advice on how to lobby, fundraise, and defend European citizenship rights. It is a large cross-sectoral European association bringing together members from different areas of activity: civil liberties, culture, development, health and social welfare, as well as general civil society development agencies.

ECAS is an advice service for individuals as well as NGOs. It runs hotlines and its team of legal experts handles complaints. <http://www.ecas.org>

EHF is in contact with ECAS and attends its meetings and press conferences when it deals with matters of interest for the humanist movement.

On 10 August 2005, two EHF representatives attended the press conference launching a hotline on the free movement of people in the European Union.

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation was launched in 1963 to further the cause of peace, and to assist in the pursuit of freedom and justice. It sought to identify and counter the causes of violence, and to identify and oppose the obstacles to worldwide community. It has always struggled for freedom of thought and opinion, and for non-exploitative forms of human association.

Following consultation with peace movements and others throughout Europe about the grave situation in which we all find ourselves, a European Network for Peace and Human Rights began to establish itself in 2003. www.russfoud.org

On 20-21 October 2005, EHF took part in the conference of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights, in the European Parliament in Brussels and more particularly in the workshop on "The crisis in civil liberties and human rights".

ACTIVITIES AND ACTION WITH MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

CONCORDATS

The **National Secular Society** (NSS), has kept updating and adding information to the web site "Concordat Watch" - <http://www.secularism.org.uk/concordatwatch2.html>.

NSS and the **British Humanist Association**, along with EHF, have taken part to some meetings of the All Party Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics of the European Parliament. (See item “All Party Working Group on Separation of Religion and EHF report on Activities 2005-06

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Politics” in the chapter on the European Parliament)

The Slovak humanist organisation **Prometheus Society** <http://slovakia.humanists.net/> and EHF have kept on closely collaborating in the fight against the draft Treaty on the Objection of Conscience ever since it was publicly issued in January 2005. If the treaty had been ratified

and signed, the doctrine of the Catholic Church would have been imposed to all the citizens of the Slovak Republic in many fields like health care, reproductive health, education, judicial

decisionmaking and provision of legal services, employment and labour relations.

(See item “All Party Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics” in the chapter on the European Parliament)

At EHF GA in Berlin, in 2005, V. Pegna suggested member organisations from countries having a concordat got together and applied for funding to set something up.

This proposal has not had the opportunity to be implemented yet.

DRUGS

EHF received a strong support from the Belgian **Centre d'action laïque** and **Unie Vrijzinnigen Verenigingen** for the preparation of a position on a more efficient European drugs policy.

The video-DVD “Drogues : questions ouvertes” was made good use of.

(See items *European Parliament and OSCE*)

SECULARISM

Collaboration with the **Centre d'Action Laïque** and with the **Ligue française de l'Enseignement** was very promising (See *Promotion of Humanism*)

PROMOTION OF HUMANISM AND SECULARISM - FIGHTING AGAINST DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NON BELIEVERS

“Laïcité : les exceptions d’hier et les enjeux d’aujourd’hui”

Conference organised by the **Fédération de la Moselle de la Ligue de l’Enseignement** in collaboration with the **Cercle Jean Macé** and the **Ligue des Droits de l’Homme**, in Metz (France) on 1 and 2 April 2005. G. Liénard was on the panel of a round table and presented a talk on on “ Laïcité, "valeur d’avenir dans une société en pleine mutation”.

“Promoting Humanism : Internationally, Nationally and Locally

A British Humanist Association (<http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/>) conference in Gateshead (UK), on 10-12 June 2005. G. Liénard gave a talk on “Humanism in the EU”.

“Berlin – Metropole des Humanismus”

24 May 2005 at the Berliner Philharmonie, Berlin (Germany). EHF Board members and representative of EHF member organisations attended the concert and the award ceremony of the music composition competition organised by the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (HVD), which was part of the 2005 numerous activities for the centenary of HVD.

“The limits of religious freedom”

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Conference organised by EHF and the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands, hosted in the HVD building on 25 May 2005.

Talks by J.M. Ducomte, G. Liénard, S. Nilsen, F.O. Wolf (HVD) and D. Pollock (British Humanist Association). EHF Board members M. Marchand and V. Pegna were the moderators.

“Construisons l'école du libre examen”

Several representatives of EHF attended the 2005 Humanist Convention organised by the Centre d'Action Laïque, on 15 October 2005, in Brussels.

“Une laïcité à l'échelle du monde au XXIème siècle”

On 9 December, in the Paris Town Hall, a DVD record on the 1905 French law on separation of Churches and State was presented in presence of official French representatives.

A "Universal Declaration on Secularism in the XXI Century" was officially presented.

On 10 December, Ligue de l'Enseignement and a collective of French laïque organisations, in collaboration with EHF, organised an international conference chaired by J.M. Ducomte, President of "La Ligue" and EHF Vice-President. EHF Vice-President V. Pegna and General Secretary G. Liénard gave speeches during the round table on “Quelles sont les propositions pour la laïcité dans l'Union européenne, quels partenariats et quelles modalités pour y parvenir?”. The President of EHF member organisation Centre d'Action Laïque also gave a talk at the same round table. The purpose of this round table was to debate on general principles for "laïcité" in the XXI century.

“Can Europe be saved ? A plea for a social approach in education”

Seminar organised by the Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften, in Schloss Schney (Germany), on 27-28-29 January 2006. The general secretary delivered a talk "Influence of Humanists on consensus in basic values in the EU". The objectives of the programme for 2010 of the EU Commission for active citizenship "learning democratic values, equal opportunities, fair access for the less privileged" had been emphasised.

ENHANCEMENT OF THE VISIBILITY OF EHF AND OF HUMANISM

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST AND ETHICAL UNION (IHEU)

In the framework of the implementation of the protocol agreement between IHEU and EHF, IHEU is represented by its First Vice-President Sonja Eggerickx at each EHF Board meeting. EHF contributes to each issue of IHEU magazine International News giving information on matters dealing with humanism in Europe and the European Union. <http://www.iheu.org> EHF was represented at the 2005 IHEU General Assembly, in Paris, on 7-8 July 2005. EHF attended the IHEU 16th world Humanist Congress in Paris, on 5-7 July 2005, by IHEU and La Libre Pensée Française. On behalf of EHF, the president of the Centre d'Action Laïque delivered a talk on “Philosophical and religious beliefs and political authorities in Europe” during the session on Separation of Religion and State and the European Union.

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INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST AND ETHICAL YOUTH ORGANISATION

IHEYO (<http://www.iheyo.org/>) organised an international conference in Paris, on 8-14 July 2005 on "Humanism, interculturalism and young active citizenship".

S. Mommaerts represented EHF. She gave the welcoming talk on behalf of EHF. She stressed the need to inform young people about the work of the Federation, how co-operation could be set up between IHEYO and EHF and the possibility of undertaking projects together on different levels: social, cultural, educational as well as on discrimination and on the development of an European Identity. Frederik Dezutter could have been the go-between. She thanked the IHEYO board for giving the opportunity to participate in the conference.

OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DE LA LAÏCITÉ

Structure for exchange, co-operation and to improve the circulation of information regarding humanist issues. 2005 has been mostly devoted to the preparation of events celebrating the centenary of the French 1905 secular law. Two out of three of the annual meetings have been replaced by larger ones opened to non members. The topics discussed were mainly technical (discussion about the appeal to be launched, organisation of the demonstration held in

December, etc.). There is no clear programme of activities and no list of discussion topics for 2006 so far.

THINKING FREELY ABOUT EUROPE

It 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.

A lunch and debate is organised in a restaurant in Brussels once a month. A special 100th debate will be organised in April 2006.

<http://users.skynet.be/penseelibre/>

CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

“Europe et Laïcité”

Conference co-organised by the Belgian Centre d'Action Laïque, EHF and the Frenchspeaking

Université de Galatasaray, was held in Istanbul (Turkey) on 5 May 2005.

G. Liénard gave a talk on the structuration of the Belgian humanist movement.

An interesting comparison was performed between the situation in Turkey and in other European countries as secularism is concerned, with the participation of a important delegation of the Centre d'Action Laïque.

The conference was also attended by Turkish students of the university.

Premières Rencontres de la laïcité, de l'égalité et de la mixité

On 7 December 2005, EHF attended a conference on “La laïcité, rempart contre les intégrismes, le racisme, l'antisémitisme, la misogynie et l'homophobie ” organised by the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Centre Communautaire Laïc Juif.

La Laïcité dans tous ses Etats. Laïcité et sécularisation dans l'Union

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européenne.

International conference on 15-16-17 December 2005, organised by the CIERL (Centre interdisciplinaire d'Etude des religions et de la Laïcité) of the Université Libre de Bruxelles <http://www.ulb.ac.be/philo/cierl/>, “ La Laïcité dans tous ses Etats. Laïcité et sécularisation dans l'Union européenne ”.

Several representatives of EHF member organisations had been invited to give talks.

A report on the conference is to be published (in French).

Rencontres Européennes de Luxembourg : Etre jeune en Europe

International conference organised by the **Rencontres Européennes de Luxembourg** in Luxembourg, on 22 October 2005.

http://www.relux.lu/index.cfm?R_ID=1000&Content_ID=1000

Four main topics : Youth and work, education, drugs, involvement. EHF was in charge of the organisation of the session on drugs presented by invited youth humanist organisations.

Three EHF representatives attended the conference along with representatives of two Belgian youth organisations that presented their opinions on the subject.

The video film “Drogues: questions ouvertes” produced by the Centre Laïque Audio-visuel, one of the member organisations of the Centre d'Action Laïque, was shown.

“Multiculturalism in the European Union”

A representative of EHF attended a series of 9 lectures during the 1st semester of 2005 to address the social effects of migration on the countries of the European Union organised by the Institute for European Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, in Brussels.

International Association for Religious Freedom

Meeting with representatives of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) on 26 September 2005, in Brussels. After the cancelling of "A Soul for Europe", they were

interested in knowing the position of EHF taking into account that the European Commission was putting article 52 of the draft Treaty into practice.

COMMUNICATION

Egroups

EHF moderates two egroups. One for the member organisations only that deals mainly with administrative matters and internal discussions. The second one which has now quite a few members is used to circulate information, debate on particular issues and launch actions concerning humanist and European topics. For example, we can mention the very lively discussion started by the Islandic organisation Sidmennt on how to get financed as the Churches are with taxes.

Web site www.humanism.be

A new web site has been constructed and put on line. It is more comprehensive and has been designed to make the finding of information easier.

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

The film translated into six languages (French, Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian, English) EHF is still being asked for regularly. It is available in VHS from the EHF office for 12 euro a copy (– 25% reduction for 5 or more copies) or on DVD for 15 euro (postage included).

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Brochure “A Key to Humanism in Europe”

A special issue for the 15th anniversary of EHE is in preparation. It will be a compilation and a synthesis of the major contributions and documents drawn up by EHF for the European Institutions.

Information

EHF regularly receives numerous requests for information on a wide range of subjects, on European humanism, on the European Union and its institutions, humanist organisations, how to fight discrimination, find subsidies, etc ...

It is interesting to note that some academic works have been undertaken in different universities and high schools on EHF positions with respect to the EU and that students visit the EHF office to collect information.

European Agenda

EHF has subscribed to the European Agenda, a monthly magazine with a weekly email update of events in political Brussels, also to its Agenda Online, an extensive online database of those events and to its Agenda Profile, a contact database with all key EU players.

CONCLUSION

In 2005, EHF gained an additional important recognition from the European Union with the official meeting with the President of the Commission. The European Humanists can now have their voice clearly heard in the European Institutions.

EHF had the opportunity to obtain a first but important positive result against discrimination caused by the many concordats the Holy See has signed or is willing to sign with many countries in the European Union. This result had been obtained due to good co-ordination with some other partners and the willingness of several European Parliamentarians Co-operation for action with members has been successfully improved.

After the last European election in June 2004, the relationships with humanist parliamentarians have been largely improved, for instance, during the conflict with religious fundamentalists to finance the Catholic youth event during the Pope's visit in Köln in August 2005 and also with the Working Group for Separation of Religion and Politics.

And last but not least, the EHF web site is now implemented and contributes, with our two e-groups, to deliver better information on the actions undertaken.