



European Humanist Federation
international association under Belgian law
Fédération Humaniste Européenne
association internationale de droit belge

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REPORT ON ACTIVITY 2006

This report has been drawn up for the period going from March 2006 to March 2007

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INTRODUCTION

The **Working Plan** adopted by the EHF General Assembly on 23 June 2006, in Toledo defines the **priorities for action**, related to the defence of secularism and humanism as:

- European Institutions
- Discrimination against non believers and concordats
- 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
- European Union Presidency

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 2006

The 2006 General Assembly was hosted by Europa Laica (<http://www.europalaica.com/> in Toledo, Spain, on 23 June 2006.

The GA accepted two new member organisations: the Consulta Torinese per la Laicità delle Istituzioni (Italy) (<http://www.torinolaica.it/>) and the Humanist Association of Ireland <http://www.irish-humanists.org/>)

Board of directors

The Board of Directors met six times :

on 29 April 2006, in Brussels, hosted by the Centre d'Action Laïque
 on 22, on 24 and on 25 June, in Toledo 2006 hosted by Europa Laica
 on 7 October 2006, in Brussels, hosted by the Centre d'Action Laïque
 on 13 January 2007, in Brussels, hosted by the Centre d'Action Laïque

Current Composition of the Board

President: David Pollock (United Kingdom)

First Vice-President: Rob Buitenweg (Netherlands)

Second Vice-President: Julien Houben (Italy)

Secretary General: Georges Liénard (Belgium)

Treasurer: Suzy Mommaerts (Belgium)

Members: Tryntsje de Groot (Netherlands), Luc Devuyst (Belgium), (France), Marianne Marchand (Belgium), Werner Schultz (Germany), Baard Thalberg (Norway)

EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty

A Secular Vision for Europe

This project initiated by Roy Brown, former president of IHEU, involved a group of Humanists, Catholics (from Catholics for a Free Choice), a Muslim professor of political

science and a human rights lawyer who prepared a restatement of our common values, the liberal values of individual freedom, democracy and the rule of law on which modern European civilisation is based.

The Brussels Declaration

The Secular Vision for Europe then gave rise to a short Declaration of common values, including a call for a secular society, which was jointly sponsored by Catholics for a Free Choice, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the European Humanist Federation and the European Parliament All –Party Working Group on the Separation of Religion and Politics.

The initial signatories included over 80 MEP's, large numbers of NGO's and hundreds of prominent European politicians, community leaders and academics from 30 European States. After it was launched on 27 February 2007 in the European Parliament, it was opened for signature by all European citizens. To sign the Declaration : www.visionforeurope.org

A European Dream

EHF prepared a booklet to be published in 2007 to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, on March 25, 2007.

"A European Dream" presents a clear statement on the values and aspirations for a secular Europe in which democracy is participative as well as representative.

It also reprints the Brussels Declaration and A Secular Vision for Europe, as well as a letter from the president of EHF to the president of the European Commission.

“The EHF in Europe” – EHF 15th anniversary

In the framework of events and activities marking its 15th anniversary, EHF published an issue of A Key to Humanism in Europe. Since its creation, EHF has been involved in crucial aspects of the building of the European Union, has defended humanist positions and has spoken on behalf of the humanists of Europe and of its member organisations. The most significant documents since 1999 have been compiled in “The EHF in Europe”, in French and in English <http://www.humanism.be/in/doc/pdfs/EHF%2015th%20ann..pdf>

Commission

Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008

EHF responded to a call for ideas for the Year of Intercultural Dialogue with a proposal for a European-scale initiative contributing towards promoting intercultural dialogue.

DG Communication

Empower - European Civil Society Forum – Bergamo (Italy – 9-10 November 2006)

Organised in the framework of the consultation on the White Paper on a European Communication Policy, this conference aimed at providing the European Commission with concrete proposals on how to promote a European public space where citizens are better informed and engaged in EU policies and in the debate on the future of Europe.

The European Commission has published on its website all the contributions presented. A final report has been submitted to the European Parliament.

The EHF General Secretary presented in the parallel session "Network Europe, connecting citizens to each others" a paper entitled "To promote a European public space".

DG Education and Culture

Europe for Citizens Forum – Brussels - 28-29 September 2006

The EHF was represented at this meeting which dealt with the promotion of active European citizenship.

BEPA (Bureau of European Policy Advisers)

The BEPA is a department of the European Commission, reporting directly to the President and under his authority. It advises the President and the Commissioners and formulates recommendations on issues regarding the policy of the EU. The EHF continued in 2006 its regular attendance at the European Council debriefing meetings organised by the BEPA.

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/activities/dialogues_religions/index_en.htm

European Parliament (EP)

All-Party Working Group on Separation of Religion and Politics

Set up end 2004, this is an informal grouping of European parliamentarians, meeting regularly with members of civil society, and aims to:

- Identify issues pertaining to the intersection of religion and politics in which the political values and principles of the EU are at stake.
- Identify ways MEPs and civil society can work together to raise awareness of these issues.
- Promote knowledge, understanding and acceptance of freedom of religion and non-religion, and the impartiality of the EU regarding organizations of faith and conviction.
- Take 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.

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

EHF attended all the meetings in 2006 and provided expert information.

The March 2006 meeting was dedicated to secularism in Turkey, the June meeting to the influence of religion on ethical questions in European politics, the October meeting to "Rights or religion : can the European Parliament deliver ?". The subject of the November meeting was Christian values in the European Constitution and the Berlin Declaration. At the request of the Working Group, EHF president, David Pollock, gave a talk on humanist values and on the need for secularism in Europe

<http://www.humanism.be/in/doc/pdfs/TalkDavidPollockWGSRP.pdf>

Commission on Constitutional Affairs

On 24 April 2006 EHF was invited, as a non-confessional organisation, by the Commission of European Affairs of the European Parliament to a "Forum for the Civil Society". Georges Liénard delivered a talk expressing some of the proposals presented previously to the Convention chaired by Giscard d'Estaing.

European Economic and Social Committee

EHF was present at a session of "Discourses on Europe" with Daniel Barenboim, Jose Manuel Barroso, and the new President of the European Parliament on 29 January 2007, organised by the new association "A Soul for Europe".

Council of Europe

Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly

The Committee on Culture, Science and Education is preparing a series of reports and other related activities under the general theme of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The reports, due for debate at the June 2007 session, are on New steps in the field of intercultural and interconfessional dialogue, Relations between state, religion and the individual and on Blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion.

A colloquy to exchange views was held on 27 February 2007 in Strasbourg. EHF representative to OSCE, Vera Pegna made an intervention (www.humanism.be/).

Keith Porteous Wood of the National Secular Society was also present.

INGO Conference - 5 October 2006

Suzy Mommaerts attended the hearing on the drafting of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and participated in the meeting of two groupings :Education and Culture, Civil Society and Democracy in Europe.

INGO Conference 31 January 2007

Georges Liénard attended the meeting of NGOs and the workshops working on "poverty and social cohesion" and "European social charter".

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NON-BELIEVERS AND CONCORDATS

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

NGO's International Conference – Brussels 16-17 May 2006

This was organised in the framework of the Belgian chairmanship of the OSCE by an OSCE 2006 coalition of Belgian NGO's. EHF set up two workshops : one on drugs trafficking and the use of drugs with the Centre d'Action Laïque and the other on intersociety dialogue with the Unie Vrijzinnigen Verenigingen. http://www.humanism.be/in/eur/cont_5.htm

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2006 – Warsaw - -13 October 2006

D. Pollock, S. Mommaerts and Vera Pegna attended the OSCE conference for four days, along with representatives of governments, of a hundred or more NGOs and of bodies such as the Council of Europe. EHF representatives organised a side-event on equality for non-believers and believers and made two interventions in plenary sessions.

http://www.osce.org/conferences/hdim_2006.html?page=documents&author_id=293

International Intercultural Interconvictional colloquium (3 I) : "Social cohesion in a multicultural Europe: role and impact of currents of thought and religions"

EHF, IHEU, Réseau Européen Eglises et Libertés, Ligue Internationale de l'Enseignement, Manifeste des Libertés and Cercle Crémieux have been preparing a colloquium which has been accepted by the Council of Europe as part of their project on Social Cohesion in a

Multi-Cultural Europe.

The project was presented by G. Liénard to the assembly of recognised NGOs to the Council of Europe, at a meeting held on January 31.

The colloquium will take place in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, on 3 and 4 October 2007.

DEVELOPMENT OF SYNERGIES WITH MEMBERS AND IHEU

EHF workshop - Toledo - 23 June 2006

Presentation by EHF member organisations of their main activities. Discussion on the EHF Working Plan 2006-2007, half a day before the general assembly.

EHF 15th anniversary

Official reception

A reception was organised by the Vice-President of the Castilla La Mancha Government in the famous old building of the regional government.

Symposium "Promotion of secularism in Spain, in the EU and in Europe" – Toledo - 24 June 2006

Organised by EHF and Europa Laica in the framework of the activities marking the 15th anniversary of EHF.

Dinner of the 15th anniversary of EHF – Toledo – 24 June 2006

Before the dinner, a short and friendly reception was organised in honour of Steinar Nilsen who had reached the end of his term of EHF president. Werner Schultz, on behalf of the Board, presented an address to Steinar to thank him for his participation. Sonia Eggerickx, on

behalf of IHEU, complimented Steinar for his presidency. A souvenir was presented to Steinar and to his wife.

The dinner was organised in collaboration with Europa Laica. The newly elected president David Pollock was presented to the audience by Steinar Nielsen.

1st Baltic Humanist Conference

Baard Thalberg represented EHF at the First Baltic Humanist Conference, in Stockholm, on 10-12 November 2006, a co-organisation between the Swedish Humanisterna, the Norwegian Huma-Etisk Forbund, IHEU and EHF. The theme was “State, secularism and the humanist challenge”. Topics, events and debates focused on well known humanist concerns. It was agreed a 2nd Baltic Conference would be organised. Suzy Mommaerts attended too.

EHP

EHF and European Humanist Professionals continued having contacts and exchanging information.

EHF welcomed the idea to have an EHP seminar take place in Torino at the time of the EHF activities and helped organise it.

IHEU

EHF and IHEU maintained close and regular contacts. The IHEU president was invited to the EHF board meetings. Since the June 2006 GA, Rob Buitenweg, IHEU Vice-President has become EHF First Vice-President and is charged with maintaining closed contact between the associations.

EHF contributes an article on European questions to the IHEU magazine International Humanist News.

IHEYO

EHF and IHEYO continued having contacts and exchanging information.

Human-Etisk Forbund (Norway)

President Steinar Nilsen represented EHF at the 50th anniversary of the Norwegian humanist association.

Humanist Society of Scotland

Luc Devuyt and Suzy Mommaerts attended the conference on “Secular schooling – the way ahead”, on 27-29 October 2006, in Kingussie, Scotland.

ENHANCEMENT OF EHF VISIBILITY AND CAPACITY FOR ACTION.

Observatoire européen de la Laïcité

Claude Wachtelaer represented EHF at the meetings held in Paris.

Thinking freely about Europe

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.

A lunch and debate is organised in Brussels once a month.

2006 was the year of the 100th debate which took place in the European Parliament in 20 April. Claude Wachtelaer and Georges Liénard represented EHF and presented their greetings.

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

Permanent Forum of Civil Society

NGO Forum: Citizens facing the EU - 30 March 2006

Georges Liénard represented EHF at this hearing, organised by the Permanent Forum of Civil Society

Conferences and meetings

18ème Colloque de la laïcité “ Valeurs laïques, sociales et démocratiques : Faut-il désespérer de l’Europe ? ” - Brussels - 11 March 2006

Georges Liénard spoke on “ L’Europe laïque face à l’offensive théo-conservatrice ”

Non-formal education, a project for the inhabitants in the city” - Lyon (France) - 13 September 2006

Suzy Mommaerts attended this seminar organised by the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning.

Europe : Unité et/ou diversité – Luxembourg – 14 October 2006

10th Rencontres Européennes de Luxembourg attended by Suzy Mommaerts and Georges Liénard who gave a speech on " the come-back of Churches against secularism"

“Making Sense in the City” - Ghent University (Belgium) - 17-20 December 2006

Suzy Mommaerts, Georges Liénard and Tryntsje de Groot attended this international symposium on culture, community and identity in the urban world.

“Laicità : tutela e garanzia delle diversità” – Roma - 15 February 2007

In the framework of the cultural activities planned by the Municipality of Rome “Roma reale, Roma plurale”, February 15th was devoted to “The reality and the plurality of Rome as a safeguard and guarantee of secularism”. It was organized by two of the mayor’s Consultative commissions, one on religions and one on secularism. The two key speakers spoke of the separation of Church from State, of religion from governance, of private from public. Luigi Ferrajoli, magistrate and professor of the Philosophy of Law at La Sapienza University, did so in the light of the Italian Constitution and Elena Paciotti, former MEP, and president of the Lelio Basso Foundation did so in the light of the European constitutional treaty.

The meeting was chaired by Vera Pegna, EHF representative to OSCE

Communication

Egroups

EHF moderates two egroups for e-mail discussion. One, for the member organisations only, deals mainly with administrative matters and internal discussions. The second now has more members than previously and is used to circulate information, debate on particular issues and launch actions concerning humanist and European topics.

Web site

www.humanism.be

Publications

The EHF in Europe

A special issue of “A Key to Humanism in Europe” (mentioned above) was published for the 15th anniversary of EHF. It is a compilation and a synthesis of the major contributions and documents drawn up by EHF for the European Institutions.

A European Dream

See above : 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty

Information

EHF regularly receives and responds to requests for information on a wide range of subjects, particularly from students doing research on the relations between State/EU and religions and on the positions taken by non-believers.