

Fédération Humaniste Européenne

European Humanist Federation

International non-profit association under Belgian law

For the withdrawal of article 37 of the European Constitution

The Convention on the Future of Europe has devoted to the churches Article 37 of the future European Constitution, in Title VI of the draft that deals with the democratic life of the Union.

§1 – The European Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of the churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.

§2 – The European Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

§3 – The Union shall maintain a regular dialogue with these churches and organisations, recognising their identity and their specific contribution.

Paragraphs 1 and 2 incorporate Declaration 11, which was adopted outside the Amsterdam Treaty, in 1997. If this text is included, the European Union will not be able to take any measures concerning discriminatory practices in favour of the churches. These practices are very common in the majority of the European countries and especially in the new member states who have recently signed a Concordat with the Vatican.. This article sole purpose is to block any evolution in the status of the churches in the E.U.

The non-confessional organisations that have a democratic structure, cannot lose any advantages as most of these don't have or just a fraction of the subventions the churches can count on.

The third paragraph acknowledges the churches a privileged and 'regular dialogue' with the Union due to their "identity" and "specific contribution" even though Article 34 grants 'an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society'.

Every church believes that it has the Truth, and while it is perfectly lawful for them to direct their transcendental message to their own believers, it is unacceptable that such a message should be enshrined in a legal institutional document like the European Constitution. If our Constitution were to recognise that, on account of their religious identity, the churches have a specific contribution to make to the democratic process, this would be tantamount to acknowledging that the source of law lies outside Parliament.

If this article is adopted, direct and official interventions of the churches in the Union policies are to be expected concerning a large number of issues of social life in particular abortion, voluntary euthanasia, contraception, family issues, the situation of women, biomedical research, divorce, education,....

163 Members of the European Parliament have signed a draft Resolution for the respect of the principles of religious freedom and the secular nature of the state in the future European Constitution, recalling that "the principles of the secular nature of the state, the quality and non-discrimination between citizens, and hence between different religions and churches, lie at the basis of democracy and the rule of law."

The European Humanist Federation and all people and associations defending the principle of laïcité of the public institutions and of the separation of state and church are appalled by the proposed Article 37 and demand its withdrawal.

17 April 2003