



EHF GENERAL ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Saturday May 29, 2021 [online]

CONCEPT MINUTES OF MEETING

1. Welcome address by EHF President

The chair, Michael Bauer, welcomes all delegates and guest attendees.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation the meeting is yet again held online.

He welcomes the new EHF member, the Finnish Humanist Association. Unfortunately, they are not attending today.

The last general Assembly took place in November 2020. An overview of international EHF activities will be published later this year.

Today the General Assembly discusses the transition proposal on EHF merging into IH.

2. Verification of proxies and mandates

Jitske Grift explains there are no proxies nor mandates. Today, 28 member organizations with voting rights are participating. This number is sufficient to take validated decisions.

3. Announcement of results from the Correspondence General Assembly (to be referred to hereafter as: GA)

All results have been approved.

3. Report on Board activities

Michael Bauer informs on the EHF Board's activities during the past half year.

A lot of time was spent on the transition process, with a lot of Board and executive committee meetings and negotiations with Humanists International (to be referred to hereafter as: HI).

He thanks the other members of the Transition Committee for their (voluntary) efforts:

- Neil Anderson, Humanist Society Scotland (not an EHF Board member, member of the European Humanists Professionals Committee)
- Kaja Bryx, Polish Rationalist Association, Poland
- Lone Ree Milkær, Humanistisk Samfund, Denmark
- Patrik Lindenfors, Swedish Humanist Association, Sweden
- Ineke de Vries, Humanistisch Verbond, The Netherlands

He also thanks Jitske Grift, EHF staff member, for organizing today's meeting.

The EHF Board keeps the dialogue going with the European Union, and attended several art. 17 meetings with, amongst others, the vice president of the European Parliament on human rights and social issues and the responsible officers of the External Affairs Agency on freedom of religion. There are upcoming meetings on trade policies and green deals.

4. Presentation on the Transition

Lone Ree Milkær, EHF Vice-president, gives a presentation on the process followed by the Transition committee.

During the EHF Board Meeting of March 7th, 2021, the Board agreed on the following mission statement for the European Humanist Movement.

The main goal of the development of EHF is to strengthen the humanist movement in Europe. This is primarily done by facilitating a high level of cooperation between the Member Organizations (MO's) and securing sufficient and relevant political representation.

The EHF wished to strengthen its position within the European institutions, especially but not exclusively in the EU-institutions, and strengthen the network of humanist professionals, including volunteers.

She then explains the various considerations leading up to this transition process:

- Investigating the set-up of a European division of HI
- EHF does not dispose of staff members or offices anymore as of May 2020
- The co-operation with CAL was terminated
- EHF does not have any daily representation in EU institutions
- So far, EHF has worked with volunteer Board members only

After the last General Assembly and after the events in May 2020, the following decisions were made:

- The transition committee was set up with the members as mentioned above.
- Some of the members organizations were kind enough to temporarily fund a part time staff member.
- A month ago, some of the larger organisations within EHF gave their consent to EHF becoming a HI division.

The motion agreed during the EHF GA in 2020 is explained in detail as follows:

During negotiations on a new organization structure the Transition Committee aims at the following conditions for EHF in the new entity, in accordance with HI statutes and procedures:

This entity:

- has its own **statutory rules** and **financial resources**.
- chooses its own **Executive Committee**.
- is **autonomous** in its day-to-day functioning and decisions.
- is **adequately represented in the Board of HI** by an appointed member of the Executive Commission.
- must have necessary **staff** at its disposal to be able to perform its tasks.

Currently, EHF is not sufficiently funded and cannot execute all activities and tasks to improve the European humanist movement.

- **Democratic structure**

- There can only be one executive body, which is the board of HI, according to the bylaws.
- There can therefore be no independent statutory rules nor direct representation on the board of HI by the European Forum.
- This European Forum does not have its own Executive Committee.
- It is therefore in principle not autonomous nor decides on its own affairs. The proposed European Forum is supposed to advise on European matters but cannot decide differently from the HI Board.

The increased network opportunities in this proposal because of the substantial adding of staff would be beneficial to democratic process as a European network will have more opportunities to discuss important European matters.

- Discussions will, if the motion is passed, transfer to the democratic structures of HI, which is a democratic organization. All the former MO's will be members.

- **Representation**

Historical differences between members (secularism, humanism, laicity) will be considered and respected, as well as ensuring continued European geographical representation and emphasis on continuing EHF lobbying activities with the various EU-institutions.

As some members have left EHF because of the expected merged with HI efforts must be made to make all EHF MO's feel secure and represented within IH.

- **Funding**

There are no funding opportunities for continuing an independent EHF.

EHF requires substantial funding to secure adequate staffing to be able to further develop a strong European Humanist movement. The new proposed organization structure sees to this.

EHF prefers not to depend exclusively on large funders in the new structure. This has to do with its previous experience where one large contributor of staff withdrew their support unexpectedly which left EHF in a very insecure financial position.

The future funding principles to be determined by HI.

- a. Question from the Members**

Jean Levain, representative of Union des Familles Laïques from France, states his point of view. He understands both organizations, HI and EHF, were previously united and now get back together again. There are objective reasons for this which have been duly explained. He is not opposed to this new structure and thanks for the difficult work done, but the goal is to obtain better conditions to support humanism on a European level in all its diversity. In the future European Forum, France should not be represented as a country but supporting the concepts of laicity. He will await developments.

Michael Bauer (chair) feels this new forum should show a good balance between laïcité, humanism et cetera and represent all different views in Europe.

Tom Hedalen from the Human Etisk Forbund from Norway thanks the Transition Committee for their huge amount of work.

Clearly there is a shared commitment on the future of humanism in Europe. The Norwegian humanist association has for a long time wanted a more effective cooperation between European humanist organizations to create a community which has influence on European decisions.

The current proposal in their view offers an opportunity not to be missed and his organization strongly supports this.

A lot of details, such as the participation and representation in the new structure needs to be discussed but he feels that the benefit of the proposals outweighs the potential downsides.

Renate Bauer from the Bund Freireligiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands, from Germany, thanks everyone for all the work done voluntarily. She feels it is good that the double membership structure which applied to be lot of the European organizations will be dissolved.

On the other hand, Europe has a unique structure, with the European Union, European Parliament and the Council of Europe which was why EHF was needed as well. This must be pointed out clearly in the HI structure. A European forum needs to have a structure to be able to deal with these specific political entities.

Lone Ree Milkær comments that the new structure will imply a significant upgrade of the representation in the European institution and lobby. This has been a focus of particular attention during the negotiations with HI.

Michael Bauer (chair) adds that there are several topics pertaining to the new structure that need to be dealt with such as the election procedures and appointment of Board members, the re-professionalizing of European activities.

The HI Board of HI should contribute to this transition process. He expects the transition to formalize within a year but stresses that the current EHF structure will most definitely not be dissolved before there being certainty on the effectiveness of the new structure.

Ineke de Vries is equally happy with the proposal to become one strong European organization. This has taken a long time and is considered a historical movement. However, there are still issues to be resolved jointly. Her organization is more than willing to actively participate in the follow-up.

Yvan Dheur from the Flemish Humanist Association, from Belgium, agrees with the previous speakers. He has always sustained both organizations and, despite disparities in the past on the concept of humanism, his organization is happy with this way forward. He thanks the Transition Committee for their efforts and encourages them to go forward with this proposal. He looks forward to the future cooperation.

Antti Värri from the Finnish Humanist Association, from Finland, supports the proposal as a good way forward, but only when there is certainty that the structures are in place. This is required to represent the Humanist movement in the European institutions.

Monika Belitoiu, from ASUR (Asociatia Secular-Umanista Din Romania), from Romania, confirms her organization supports the proposal. She agrees with previous speakers that attention must be paid to the final version of the proposal and focus must be on the position in the European institutions, as Romania and other countries do not have a longstanding

history with humanism. Therefore, decisions by the European Parliament are important in promoting humanist values. This new structure will be of help and HI should also consider Eastern-European issues going forward.

Giorgio Maone, Executive Board Member of the Italian Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics (UAAR), from Italy, endorses the proposal as well.

Lone Ree Milkær comments on the economic aspect. HI has done some preliminary work on accountancy and has stated that IH membership will not be more expensive; HI does not intend to raise membership fees.

Keith Porteous Wood of the National Secular Society, from the United Kingdom, expresses thanks for the hard work. He has been working with European institutions for 25 years, which is not always easy, even more so now due to Brexit. As an accountant by profession, he worries about some of the consequences on the fundamental economics. Are the staff members mentioned additional staff to what the current HI staff?

Is HI entirely London based? This would mean large additional costs which somebody needs to pay, by HI? Or is HI subsidized? This does not seem to add up unless there are additional fees. As a condition, he encourages appointing a dedicated vice-president to Europe.

He agrees with the reticence over the continuance of EHF as a legal entity and for the EHF Board of keeping their duty by keeping EHF as an entity for another three years until the new structure works in practice.

Michael Bauer (chair) shared these amendments put in writing by Mr. Wood.

He agrees and confirms that financial matters and on funding are still an important part of the ongoing negotiations. Proposed is a voluntarily additional contribution for the European organizations who will be part of the new structure.

Katia Labidi of Humanistischer Verband Deutschland, from Germany, points out that not all MO's have equal financial positions. Democratic processes and transparency are therefore needed before dissolving the own organization.

Ineke De Vries informs, in reply to Mr. Wood that the intention is there will be additional staff appointed. The work will not be done solely by current IH staff.

It is acknowledged that is difficult to do lobbying only being London based. Staff can be stationed elsewhere and be deployed by HI.

The financial proposal must be developed and detailed, considering member fees but also additional donations.

Jean Levain asks what the difference is compared to the former financing structure of EHF.

Lone Ree Milkær underlines that the future financing structure is more secure, as the staff does not depend on one organization and is more transparent.

She points out that the Transition Committee has not discussed finances but she is optimistic this aspect will be dealt with by IH in a constructive manner.

Michael Bauer (chair) confirms that during the coming month, this process will be prepared and the first European staff members will be on-boarded. IH has the funds and the staff to provide for this.

b. Statement on the Transition

The text proposal is as follows:

Richy Thompson, Humanists UK, from the United Kingdom, fully supports this proposal.

A merger is a good idea to ensure a stronger future for humanism in Europe.

The larger member organization in Europe have the willingness to increase their funding.

The staffing levels named are quite ambitious and hopefully can be achieved.

The UK has one parttime staff member but this number may hopefully expand through this proposal.

HI has grown and professionalized quite substantially over recent years and has more than 500 staff members, of which some are now also based in Brussels.

HI has 10 Board members, 4 of which are based in Europe, so there is already a strong representation from Europe in place and in his view, no additional representation is needed.

After discussion it was decided that the amendments as presented by Keith Porteous Wood will be considered but will not be conditional for any further decisions. Possibly an additional GA will be organized to discuss matters further.

It is felt that the structure proposed gives room for European humanism and important topics. The diversity of European views on humanism political will be heard more in future. Current MO's must look at what unites them, without at the same time disregarding their differences.

The end of 2021 deadline for the transition is discussed.

Lone Ree Milkær underlines that a process review must be done by the end of this year but this process will require more time.

Keith Porteous Wood is pleased that his amendments will be considered. He feels that an end of the year would create unrealistic expectations and would be far too early to dissolve the EHF, which would be irrevocable. He feels that at least a period of 2 years would be required to finalize this process.

c. Vote discussion and Vote

Jitske Grift explains voting procedures and shares the results of the vote:

Of which 90% agreed to the proposal, equaling 18 votes.

and of which

10% did not agree to the proposal, equaling 2 votes.

NB 8 parties abstained from voting.

As a majority of votes was in favor of the proposal of a future Humanists International European structure, as outlined during this meeting, it has passed with 69% of the votes.

5. Any other business

Patrik Lindenfors informs that, to facilitate a smooth transition, Michael Bauer, the current EHF president, has agreed to run as a candidate for the IH board. He kindly requests to support this candidacy. Michael Bauer would welcome this support.

6. Closing remarks

Michael Bauer says a lot of work still needs to be done but today's approval on the Transition proposal gives confidence for the future. He thanks all for attending today's meeting.