

Memorandum:
European Parliamentary Elections
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Introduction

OUR ASSOCIATION is a member of the European Humanist Federation (EHF), a non-profit international organisation under Belgian law, created in 1991. Its main aim is to represent its members and to promote the principles of humanism and secularism of society to the European institutions.

OUR ASSOCIATION supports and promotes the actions and demands of EHF. We consider that the building of a democratic Europe implies the neutrality and strict impartiality of the European institutions with regard to all the citizens, whatever their religious or philosophical convictions.

OUR ASSOCIATION watches closely the evolution of the European Union particularly as concerns issues related to citizenship, non-discrimination, human rights, ethics, development co-operation, freedom and the separation between Churches and European institutions. Our actions are guided by concern to see the European Union develop participative democracy, tolerance between different lifestyles and equal rights for citizens whatever their religious or philosophical convictions.

OUR ASSOCIATION and EHF campaign against nationalism, for respect for human rights and dignity for all human beings, for a humanist moral approach based on responsibility, for civil and social solidarity, and for philosophical pluralism.

The Union is founded on the indivisible and universal principles of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

For Impartial and Neutral European Institutions

OUR ASSOCIATION stresses the role that public power has to play with regard to separation between Churches and European institutions which must be impartial. Only the pre-eminence of the civil over the religious, of the general public interest over the aspirations of particular ideological groups, can avoid socio-cultural diversity being translated into a juxtaposition of ghettoised communities indifferent to, conflicting with, or even hostile to one another.

OUR ASSOCIATION demands :

- that Community institutions ensure the total independence of official bodies, of public services and of European legal activities as regards Churches, clergies, confessional influence.
- that Community Law guarantees the exercise of legitimate rights (individual and collective) with regard to religion in the sphere of private life of which they pertain to, without ever interfering with the public and the political sphere.

Non discrimination

Discrimination is apparent in numerous member States and candidate countries against various social groups : women, Jews, believers of minority or unrecognised religions, but also all those who are not religious, the "non-believers". Such discrimination is apparent in education, religious courses, social aspects, intrusion upon privacy, certain political privileges, official ceremonies with an exclusively religious character, etc.

It is time to realise that a large number of citizens with democratic values and without religious beliefs increasingly consider this discrimination as unacceptable.

Good European governance must ensure that legislation and customs associating Churches and religions in member States are not discriminatory against citizens, notably those who do not adhere to any religion.

It is still necessary to take notice, despite noteworthy progress, of extensive discrimination suffered by women through failure of society to treat men and women equally. Inequalities found in many sections of society as a result of family or cultural pressure foster the inequalities that can be seen at the level of employment and social welfare.

OUR ASSOCIATION points out that employment and social law, which in part link to European Union competencies, are two areas where the Union could take action on sex equality.

Security

The security of citizens depends on a large number of factors which are not limited to fighting crime - petty or serious - and to fighting against terrorism. Security concerns also proper living conditions, employment, social security (illness, unemployment ...).

Since the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, the struggle against terrorism has become one of the priorities of the whole international community and one of the major themes within international and regional organisations. This struggle has had a major impact on the balance between freedom and security.

The seriousness of some offences has provoked distortions of fundamental principles of international law and of criminal law and procedure. Exceptional judicial procedures have been put in place for the trial of individuals assumed to be terrorists.

When fighting terrorism democratic societies need to demonstrate that, unlike the terrorists, they value and respect human rights and democratic procedures. History shows that it is in times of war and instability that it is most dangerous to adopt special measures limiting freedom and granting excessive powers to the State.

OUR ASSOCIATION invites the Union to re-examine their policies of maintaining civil liberties and preserving Human Rights in the light of these principles.

Immigration and asylum

We must remember that there is a fundamental distinction between asylum policy and immigration policy.

Moved by our deep concern for human rights, we urge the European Union and its Member States to take all possible steps to ensure, in a concerted way, at all stages in their reception respect for the human dignity of refugees and asylum seekers.

OUR ASSOCIATION asks the Union to review the current immigration policy so that a coherent European policy is implemented.

In the name of the principle of equality, we demand that asylum seekers have at their disposal the

means required to formulate their applications, under conditions safeguarding the respect of persons and taking real-life situations into account.

Border control policies must absolutely respect the humane values defended by Member States.

Such policies must be part of a revised North-South relationship and of overseas development policy.

Non economical services of general interest

The European social model is in crisis particularly because social tensions are becoming progressively more serious. They manifest themselves as new social demands that the national and European systems cannot easily accommodate.

These tensions are linked to the appearance of new social insecurities connected with our transformation into post-industrial societies (rapid obsolescence of qualifications, inadequate provisions for the insecurity of employment, discontinuity of professional careers, contracting out of low value added services, relocation of industrial activity . . .), and with the development of factors such as ageing populations, single-parent families, working women, conflicts between family life and employment, demands for safety from all risks, and of new ways of life - urban growth, geographic mobility, weakened local loyalties and greater dependence on public services by people with reduced resources. . .

These problems are often beyond the scope of national intervention. Rather, it is a matter of managing the social consequences of globalisation, and of adapting retirement and social security systems to the greater mobility of the people of Europe or to the flexibility of the labour market.

The public sector guarantees equal treatment for everyone and contributes importantly to social cohesion. That can only happen with a public sector capable of counterbalancing market influences in guaranteeing the basic services to which all citizens without exception must have access.

OUR ASSOCIATION demands that public undertakings and undertakings providing services of general economic interest be guaranteed to all citizens without exception and that all necessary measures be taken with a view to strengthening public services in the following areas: education, culture, health, personal security, worker protection, protection of the environment, help for the underprivileged, aged and disabled.

Fight against Exclusion and Poverty

Several European Councils have dealt with the struggle against poverty and social exclusion. The Council of Nice approved the objectives intended for the preparation of the plans presented in June 2001 by member states.

OUR ASSOCIATION asks that all possible steps be taken to effectively implement these national plans. They need to produce effects very quickly because the constant growth of poverty and of exclusion is unacceptable when Europe is one of the most prosperous regions of the world.

We consider that the European Union can and must show the way to a more equitable way of life for all.

Towards a realistic policy on drugs

A century of prohibition has not succeeded in preventing the circulation of drugs, their trafficking by criminal gangs, their sale and consumption. On the contrary, drugs are increasingly and easily available. Rather than solve them, prohibition has actually worsened society's problems of health and security. Legal confusion and insecurity reign: it is becoming difficult to tell what is forbidden and what is allowed.

As regards the anti-drug strategy for the period 2005-2012, approved by the European Council on 17 September 2004, and the resolution of the European Parliament of 14 December 2004, our association demands the implementation of:

- a strategy of information about drugs, with explanations that are as impartial as possible and from which moralising and religious messages have been eliminated along with preconceived ideas - that is to say, 'detoxed' information;
- a strategy of controlling the market for drugs - their price and quality - from production to end-consumer.

Conclusion: Europe, a place of tolerance

The Europe that is being created is a Europe of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. It must therefore be a place of tolerance and, even better, of respect and mutual understanding.

The European Humanist Federation insists on the role that public authorities must play in this matter, particularly as regards teaching. We consider that only the priority of secular interests over religious, of the public interest over the aspirations of particular ideological groups, will be sufficient to avoid socio-cultural diversity translating itself into a juxtaposition of ghettoised communities that are indifferent, indeed opposed, if not hostile to each other.

If the European Union wishes to be a place of liberty, security and justice, this will come about the more surely by affirming, by virtue of democratic legitimacy, the basic principle of the separation of public authorities from all private centres of power or of partisan influence of whatever nature.

OUR ASSOCIATION is deeply committed to this approach and demands that Members of the European Parliament be vigilant, not least in the area of education.

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