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EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM

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The summit of heads of state and government of the European Union in June 2007 provided a detailed mandate for the elaboration of a new European treaty. In this regard it reinitiates the institutional process.

The experience of the 2005 debates shows that **the citizen's interest in the values, objectives and operating of the European Union** is far beyond of simply being “for” or “against” Europe.

Many refuse the thought that Europe is reduced to constant economic and social competition of people and companies on a market inspired by liberal theories. They rather think about its future in terms of **a renewed democratic dialogue in an expanded Europe that is solidary and open to the world**. The debate on the new treaty should respond to that very interest, positive for those that believe in active citizenship.

The future treaty has arranged some elements that could turn out positively in the construction of Europe. In return, the recognition of the rights articulated in the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” is essential. The possibility of the member states to reject its appliance raises the question of an effective implementation of common values and social and territorial cohesion of the European Union.

The immense complexity of the decision-making process could lead to paralysing and permanent horse-trading. But these changes might as well lead to a more democratic functionality. More than ever does this **democratic issue represent a sufficiently common European project so that it could also be shared by the citizens**.

The European project will also be appreciated by **the creation of a true civil dialogue where associations and NGOs will have their own place**. In the 27 countries of the EU, millions of citizens dedicate themselves amongst hundred thousands of associations and NGOs that are committed to international development, culture, sexual equality, education, social justice, fight against racism, environment, solidarity, sports, etc. in order to make a better world. They represent an authentic place of civic education, social advancement and revaluation of commitment. Distinctive from political organisations and syndicates, they complete the gathering of individuals around common values. The NGOs and associations, in their capacity of mediation, are essential links between citizens and institutional authorities. Providing privileged freedom of expression for European citizens, they can all become places likely to restore civic aspirations.

The more citizens feel like being able to **feed and to enrich the authorities' reflections**, the more decisions and propositions of the states and the European Union are heard, understood and even supported.

The European Union financed streets, bridges and other types of infrastructures. It financed the possibility of fruitful mobility for students. It is time that the same **attention is drawn to construct a European participative democracy**. Europe was born out of an economic spirit. In the future it must commit itself more within a social, cultural and civic framework assisted by associations and NGOs. It must take a serious interest in lasting developments, in being a prototype of international solidarity, in carrying the ambition of “living together in harmony” which is of high importance to our societies.

Moreover, the European Civic Forum (ECF), network of 80 national associations in 21 countries of the EU, asks:

- **The Portuguese Presidency of the European Union:**
 - to **propose**, during upcoming summits of the heads of state and government, **the conditions of a civic and popular appropriation of the debate on the future treaty**;
 - in this context, to **reinforce the democratic infrastructure for open and institutionalised debates, all-embracing acclamations and consultations**, in which the **associations and NGOs**, speakers of the European citizens, play an important role.

- **The members states holding the successive presidencies of the European Union (Slovenia, France, Czech Republic, Sweden):**
 - to favour the introduction of **new forms of “governance” that integrate more participative and decision-making establishments that gather all actors of civic society** and particularly associations of general interest, non-profit non-governmental organisations;
 - to put in execution, following the establishment of the status for European enterprises and cooperatives, **the status of European associations**. This European status should document the recognition of the role of the associations and NGOs, in their civic and social capacity, in the European civil dialogue. Furthermore, this status should be embedded in the **“charter of reciprocal commitments” between the European institutions and the organised association life**.
 - to provide **European associations the possibility to act locally and to develop transnational activities** which allows eventually millions of citizens **to feel implied in the European evolution where diversity is a trump, not an obstacle**.