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STEERING COMMITTEE EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM BRUSSELS, 13 NOVEMBER 2008

The steering committee of the European Civic Forum Forum took place on 13 November 2008 in Brussels, in the building of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

1. Acknowledgements

Jean-Marc Roirant, President of the European Civic Forum thanks the EESC for the high standard of working conditions, and in very particular Patrick Fève, Head of Unit “Relations with civil society organizations” for his collaboration.

2. New team ECF

Since November 2008, Alexandrina NAJMOWICZ is the new coordinator of the European Civic Forum, first employee of our organisation. She will be responsible of the network development, of the communication and website www.civic-forum information, as well as of the fundraising.

Since 2008, the European Civic Forum has also nominated Mr Daniel FORESTIER as internal financial auditor.

3. Report and follow-up of the first “European Civic Days”, La Rochelle (September 2008)

According to the general impression, the **diversity of the participants** was one of the strong points of the first “European civic Days” held in La Rochelle last September: national NGOs from all across Europe, political figures, representatives of French and European institutions, as well as most of the big European networks – 60 leaders of NGOs coming from 25 European countries took part in the 14 thematic workshops. Three reporters, Tamara Flanagan, Corinne Bord and Philippe Helson resumed the discussions and the propositions emerged from the high quality debates.

Bringing together grassroots organisations of the civil society and policy makers was a great achievement, a first step in bridging the gaps between citizens and European institutions, towards the recognition of the role of ONGs within the European public sphere.

The European Civic Forum has also received a very positive feedback from the representatives of European and French institutions that participated in La Rochelle: *Odile Quintin*, General Director of the DG EAC (the General Directorate of Education and Culture) was really satisfied with the opportunity to have a face to face meeting with national NGO leaders familiar with the

local issues, without passing through intermediate bodies such as platforms and “networks of networks”.

The French State Secretary for European Affairs, *Jean-Pierre Jouyet*, has also shown his deep interest in the civil dialogue and the role of NGOs within the civic ownership of the European debate. Nevertheless, he pointed out the need to structure the relations between European institutions and the associations representatives of the civil society.

While preparing the conclusions of the French Presidency of the European Union, *Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin*, French Minister for Health, Youth Affairs, Sports and Associative Life, has undertaken that the Czech and Swedish Presidencies of the European Union carry out the process for a statute of the European association and for the “certification” of NGOs representatives of the civil society, eligible to dialogue with the European institutions.

The **Summary** of the plenary sessions and the **Recommendations** emerged from the workshop debates are available on line on the European Civic Forum’s website and will be communicated to a great number of French and European institutions and policy makers. A wide communication campaign will be carried out in order to promote this event and its main results.

The board members suggested that the **Recommendations** should be translated into the languages of all members of the European Civic Forum and then communicated to the public authorities and other partners of their own.

Cédric Bloquet, Administrator of the ECF and Director of “Civisme et démocratie – CIDEM” association presents a first financial report of the European Civic Days: around 94 % of the budget was allocated to hiring premises and equipment, participants travel costs and accommodation (150 persons reimbursed), catering. The final financial report will be presented to the General Assembly of the European Civic Forum in May 2009.

The next “European civic days” will be held alternately with the “Europe for Citizens” forum of the European Commission. The second edition will take place most probably in 2010 during the Spanish Presidency of the European Union.

4. Set up of the campaign “A C Plan for Europe” - 2009 Agenda

Within a Europe often perceived as distant, the European Civic Forum has set an ambitious objective: fostering a civic and popular ownership of Europe.

In the 27 member States of the European Union millions of citizens dedicate themselves within associations and NGOs that are committed to very diverse fields such as culture, education, equality between men and women, fight against racism, solidarity, sport, etc. But the situation is different from one country to another. There are countries with a strong volunteering culture, like Finland for example (20 NGOs/1,000 inhabitants), whereas in some other countries like Luxembourg, Malta or Romania, civic engagement is rather weak. This is why the European Civic Forum aims to support the development of the volunteering practices and the capacity-building across Europe. In the framework of its “Plan C for Europe”, the Forum will inform and raise awareness on the civic and social role of associations and NGOs.

Our members actively work for this purpose in their respective countries, but we need to put these actions into a more European perspective, so that the associative actors could go beyond the national reference frame, confront practices, experiment the European dimension.

The European Civic Forum has planned some specific activities in order to meet this purpose:

1. Our campaigns: strengthening the role of civil society within the construction of an active European citizenship

The volunteering practice may provide enthusiasm for building a European Union more concerned with social justice, with everyone's access to education and culture, with respecting the Human rights and the cultural diversity.

To make Europe attractive to citizens again, it is necessary to inform and raise people's awareness, recognize and value the volunteering work, structure the exchanges and support the emergence of a real civic European dialogue. These are the main principles of "A C Plan for Europe" campaign (C as Citizenship, Civic mindedness, Communication, Civil dialogue). This campaign gives a new impetus to the European Civic Forum's ambitions and leans on two main actions indivisibly linked together and necessary to the development of an active and participatory European citizenship:

- **The support to the structuring of the associative life in Europe.** In order to encourage the development of volunteering practices, the ECF plans to inform and raise people's awareness on the role of NGOs from local to European level, to develop specific tools such as "associative twinning" in order to enhance the cooperation and the sharing of good practice within the network.
- **Setting up an institutional framework for civil dialogue,** following the example of social dialogue inscribed within the treaties and structuring the relations between public authorities and social partners. A first step towards this political and juridical construction is certainly the *statute of the European association*. This statute would officially legitimate the associations' advocacy within the European civil dialogue and would allow to clearly and transparently identifying the European networks working for the general interest and eligible to participate in the consultations with the European institutions.

2. Our meetings: privileged times of exchange and debate

Aiming to strengthen a European network of associative actors, the ECF encourages meetings and organises each semester a gathering of European associative leaders in the country holding the Presidency of the European Union. These meetings are opportunities to discuss, to make concrete proposals and to sharpen the democratic model we all wish for a Europe much closer to its citizens.

The first "European Civic Days" in La Rochelle brought together more than 1,000 leaders coming from 500 NGOs from across the European Union, from the Balkans, from Turkey, from Ukraine and from Moldavia in order to share their practices and methods and consolidate a strong network at a European scale. Several recommendations came out of the thematic debates and concern the place of the organized civil society within the democratic functioning of our societies.

The European Civic Forum wishes to promote these recommendations to the national and European institutions, continue organizing these encounters and associate a greater number of associative actors to the debate on the future of the European Union. With "A C Plan for Europe" campaign, the European Civic Forum will organize public meetings and encounters with local actors of the voluntary sector (see the agenda below).

AGENDA 2009

Date / Place	Activities	Themes	Objectives / Expected results
<p>March 2009</p> <p>Prague, Czech Republic</p>	<p>Steering committee ECF open to Czech NGOs members, followed by a conference within the framework of the Czech Presidency of the European Union.</p>	<p><i>Human rights and citizenship</i></p>	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow-up of the recommendations emerged from the first European Civic Days in La Rochelle 2008; - Setting up of the campaign “A C Plan for Europe”; <p>Expected results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moving forward on the debate relating to future perspectives of the European Union and the role of NGOS in the development of an active European citizenship; - Fostering the European identity based on a common set of values and a common history.
<p>May 2009</p> <p>EESC, Brussels, Belgium</p>	<p>General Assembly ECF and participation in the Civil Society Day organised by the ECF in partnership with other European networks</p>	<p><i>European elections 2009: dialogue, participation</i></p>	<p>Objectives: propose a “<i>Manifesto of the civil society</i>”</p> <p>Expected results: the political parties reach an agreement on the adoption of the statute of the European association and a charter of mutual commitments between the European institutions and the associative actors.</p>
<p>June 2009</p> <p>Madrid, Spain</p>	<p>ECF Office meeting, followed by a public meeting with Spanish NGOs</p>	<p><i>Civil Dialogue: “A C Plan for Europe” - information and awareness campaign</i></p>	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting up of the campaign “A C Plan for Europe”; - Follow-up of the recommendations emerged from the first European Civic Days in La Rochelle 2008; - Planning of the second edition of the European Civic Days in Madrid in 2010 during the Spanish Presidency of the European Union. <p>Expected results: Moving forward on the debate relating to the institutionalisation of civil dialogue at a European level.</p>

Date / Place	Activities	Themes	Objectives / Expected results
<p>September 2009</p> <p>Stockholm, Sweden</p>	<p>Steering committee ECF open to Swedish NGOs members, followed by a conference within the “high visibility” event of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union.</p>	<p><i>Dialogue Participation</i></p>	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow-up of the recommendations emerged from the first European Civic Days in La Rochelle 2008; - Planning of the second edition of the European Civic Days. <p>Expected results: Moving forward on the debate relating to future perspectives of the European Union and the role of NGOS in the development of an active European citizenship</p>
<p>October 2009</p> <p>Bucharest, Romania</p>	<p>ECF Office meeting, followed by a public meeting with Romanian NGOs</p>	<p><i>Civil Dialogue: “A C Plan for Europe” - information and awareness campaign</i></p>	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting up of the campaign “A C Plan for Europe”; - Follow-up of the recommendations emerged from the first European Civic Days in La Rochelle 2008; - Promote the practice sharing within the ECF network by means of NGO twinning. <p>Expected results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity building and empowering the NGOs in countries less experimented with civil dialogue practice; - Promoting intercultural dialogue and developing social bounds between European citizens from older and new member States.
<p>November 2009</p> <p>EESC, Brussels Belgium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Steering committee ECF followed by a press conference; - Participating in the DGEAC forum “Europe for citizens” 	<p><i>Follow-up of the recommendations emerged from the European Civic Days</i></p>	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give more credit and visibility to the civil society actions and achievements across Europe; - Draw up a report on the impact of the recommendations emerged from the European Civic Days and the campaign “A C Plan for Europe”. <p>Expected results: moving forward towards a more participatory European democracy.</p>

5. Forum's position on issues relating to the European elections

The European Civic Forum and some other European networks will work together to reach a joint position statement in view of the next European elections in 2009: "Manifesto of the civil society". Thus, a "Civil Society Day" will be organised in the premises of the European Parliament in May 2009, aiming to set up of a common voice the campaign in favor of the statute of the European association and a charter of mutual commitments between NGOs and European institutions.

In addition, the recommendations emerged from the European Civic Days in La Rochelle will be promoted and communicated to the future candidates of the political parties.

6. Functioning of the European Civic Forum

In order to have continuity in action, the European Civic Forum has submitted an application for funding for 2009 to the "Education and Culture" Directorate General of the European Commission, in the framework of a call for proposals of "Europe for citizens" programme.

A few proposals to insure the continuity in action and the network development:

- Improve the website and make it a real resource sharing platform for our members and other visitors, update this resource basis with presentations of NGOs members and their projects in order to better connect and facilitate the cooperation within the network;
- Facilitate the information flow within the network by means of newsletters, information and good practice sharing;
- Intermediate associative twinning and build a global project to apply for funding;
- Draw up a « map » of the civil dialogue practices within the partner countries in order to have a better overview of the volunteering practices, overtake the Est-Ouest "cleavages", and reinforce the associations in countries where the associative practice is rather weak.

7. Public presentation of the "Recommendations" emerged from the European Civic Days

The board meeting was followed by a public presentation of the Recommendations emerged from the debates in La Rochelle, in presence of Cécile Leclercq, Programmes Manager at the Citizenship Policy Unit, "Europe for Citizens", DG EAC, European Commission, of Markus Woelke, General Affairs and Future of the European Union Unit, European Cooperation Directorate, French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and Patrick Fève, Head of Unit "Relations with the civil society organizations", EESC as well as other members of the European Economic and Social Committee.

They all expressed their greetings for the achievements in the organization of the first "European Civic Days" that generated real transnational synergies between various types of

civil society actors and resulted in coherent and realistic proposals to create a social Europe so that citizens better adhere to the political construction.

Raffaella Bolini, Vice-President of the European Civic Forum and President of the Italian association ARCI also highlighted the importance, for the NGOs members of the Forum, to get in contact with other similar organisations in Europe, to create special links and to develop a common reflection on the future perspectives of the European Union. In this respect, the first European Civic Days have been an interesting experience of participatory democracy and have been a step forward to the recognition of the role of civil society within the construction of a Europe closer to its citizens.

The thematic debates on “Mobility, Dialogue, Participation” resulted in some important recommendations for the decisions concerning the place of the organised civil society within the democratic functioning of our societies.

These proposals aim at enshrining in everyday life the European values and reinforcing the relations between the national and European institutions, as pointed out Jan-Robert Suesser, Vice-president of the European Civic Forum and member of the Central Committee of the French League of Human Rights.

The debates on mobility issues outlined the main obstacles to mobility and helped the emergence of concrete proposals aiming to better take into account the social dimension mainly through the development of long term financial tools, the design of programmes for every level, both in the field of formal and non-formal education, the simplification of administrative procedures proportional to the amount of budget allowed and the set up of adequate financial instruments to support the association twining following the example of town twining.

In order to better consider the multicultural dimension of the European identity, it is recommended that the youth mobility policies foster the intercultural dialogue, promote the exercise of a residence citizenship and develop migrant reception and inclusion policies.

This first edition of the “European Civic Days” also pointed out the need to formalize the relations between civil society and European institutions, to create a statute of the European association and to increase the presence of NGOs within the European Economic and Social Committee. Within the next working plan 2009, the European Civic Forum attempts to promote these challenging proposals for the development of an active European citizenship

The European Civic Forum is particularly satisfied that these recommendations join the conclusions of the « Education, Youth, Culture » European Council. We shall promote these issues within an awareness campaign across European countries, and mainly over the course of the coming Czech and Swedish Presidency of the European Union.