

NEWSLETTER

2001 / 3

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Dr. Shaikh condemned to death in Pakistan

Dr. Shaikh was arrested in October 2000 and charged with blasphemy for allegedly having said, during a lecture in a medical college where he is a lecturer in Physiology, that neither the prophet Mohammed nor his parents could logically have been Muslims before Islam was revealed to the Prophet.

On 18 August 2001, he was sentenced to death. His appeal to Lahore High Court has been admitted.

For updated information and to know how you can help Dr. Shaikh :

www.iheu.org/shaikh www.rationalistinternational.net www.europe-et-laicite.org

EHF- FHE action

EHF-FHE wrote to the government of Pakistan after last October's arrest and has done so again now. A letter has also been sent to Mrs. Nicole Fontaine, President of the European Parliament and to Mr. Louis Michel, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs who is assuming at present the Presidency of the European Union.

Board of Directors

May – Oslo

The Board met on 4 May, in Oslo, and decided to draw up a memorandum to the Belgian government that is assuming the European Union presidency for the last half of 2001. It also examined the accounts for 2000 and the budget for 2001, prepared the next General assembly and the seminar on "Civil society in Europe".

September – London

The last meeting took place on 8 September in London

It was decided to create two new e-groups the moderator of which is still John Leeson.(for details see below).

An important document has been drawn up by the European Commission, the "White Paper on European Governance" which is open for discussion up to 31 March 2002. A group of experts is at present examining the document and preparing a position. The board decided to have this standpoint circulated through the egroup..

The project of a brochure on humanism and "laïcité" in Europe has been accepted to be financed by the European Commission.

November

The Board will meet again in November. If you want particular issues to be examined, could you send a note and the necessary information for October 20.

General Assembly

The General Assembly was held on Sunday 10 June at the Humanist House (Geuzetorre) of Ostend (Belgium). A seminar on "Civil society in Europe" took place there also on the previous day (see further on).

The GA approved the accounts for 2000, the budget for 2001, amendments to the bylaws, a new set of dues now being sent to the members, the report on activities for 2000 and projects for 2001.

Bylaws

The GA has approved changes in the federation bylaws. Some of them were mainly technical like the change of address of the main office or in wording.

Others were more fundamental. After much discussion, it was decided to delete the mention that the member organisations had to be members of IHEU. EHF-FHE can therefore be considered as an independent body and apply for membership with international institutions like the Council of Europe and others. It was stressed that a new political entity was being built in Europe and that a federative body was needed to represent humanism on a European level.

Article 5 now states that to be admitted as a member, the organisation must be accepted by the GA with a majority of eight tenths of its members present or represented.

The GA agreed that no member shall have more than two proxy votes and that the Board may upon need elect, among its members, a deputy secretary general, a deputy treasurer and one or two special advisers.

The new bylaws are available on request from EHF-FHE secretariat.

New members

A few member organisations thought it would be better to keep a link between EHF-FHE and IHEU. The GA adopted the following guidelines regarding membership on a proposal of the Board : “If an organisation applies for membership of EHF-FHE without being a member of IHEU, EHF-FHE will consult IHEU on the matter before eventually accepting it as a new member.

If an organisation decides to leave IHEU and remain a member of EHF-FHE, EHF-FHE will likewise consult IHEU before deciding whether the said organisation should remain a member of EHF-FHE”. As a consequence of this new procedure, applications for membership had to be postponed to the next GA.

Dues

A new set of dues has been adopted in order to enable members to really support an efficient management of the federation according to their financial situation. The dues of consultative members which do not have a vote at the GA has been kept at 50 euro a year. Four groups have been created for full members :

Group I	3700 euros
Group II	1000 euros
Group III	500 euros
Group IV	150 euros

European News

European Commission

Audience

The President and the Secretary General were received on 11 June, the day following the Ostend General Assembly, by Mr. M. Weninger, one of the heads of the group of political advisers of President Prodi.

This new group has been assigned, among other issues, to deal with the dialogue with the Churches as well as with humanist organisations, with the institutional reforms and with the relations with enlargement applicant countries

After the aims and the organisation of EHF-FHE had been explained, the memorandum to the Belgian government (which is presiding the European Union) was handed over.

Mr. Weninger called on the federation to state the humanist point of view on the main European issues that are of interest for its members and to member of a task force.

Memorandum

For the first time, EHF-FHE has drafted a memorandum of humanist positions for the European Union. It was sent to the Belgian government which is presiding the European Union for the second half of 2001.

EHF-FHE had collected information from its member organisations and had received many answers including from associations of Central European countries, candidates for membership into the Union.

The memorandum is available in English and in French from EHF-FHE secretariat and on the web site.

European Economic and Social Committee (ESC)

ESC invited EHF-FHE as the European association representative of the European humanist life stance, to participate to several meetings in order to define the role and the contribution of the civil society organisations to the building of Europe. An interesting contribution of ESC to the "White Paper" of the European Commission has been drawn up.

But important questions arise when trying to define "civil society organisations". For example, can churches and religion be considered as belonging to these categories.

Permanent Forum of Civil Society

Along with numerous NGO's, gathered in Brussels within the Permanent Forum of Civil society, EHF-FHE has taken part in the drawing up of a frame document on how to build a Europe closer to the desires of its citizens.

It deals with three main subjects: democracy, controlled globalisation and enlargement.

Leaving aside the language of technocrats, abstruse for most people, this text aims first of all at defining clearly what it is concerned with, then it reminds the values with which the citizens want to have Europe function in particular to elaborate a democratic Constitution or to establish sustainable development.

If one wants to put an end to the more and more frequent opposition and to the violence occurring with it, it is not police repression, equally violent, which will bring a solution, nor another form of violence, this one political, the violence of fait accompli worked out in secret by Councils of all sorts.

The objective of this document is to make the voice of civil society be heard, the voice of reason of citizens who are not necessarily hostile to Europe, provided that it does not create the decline of their culture, of their civil, political and economic rights.

European Movement

Italian council

EHF-FHE was represented by Vera Pegna of the Italian Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti at a two-day meeting organised by the Italian Council of the European Movement, in Rome. The subject of the debates was "From the Charter of Fundamental Rights to European democracy – Civil society and citizenship in Europe.

Vera Pegna stressed the importance of the neutrality of institutions and of the notion of "laïcité" in the building of Europe.

European Movement- Belgium

EHF-FHE was present at a debate organised by the European Parliament and the European Movement- Belgium on "1 July – 31 December 2001 : a turning point for the European Presidency"

Humanist news

Congratulations !!!

To the Humanistisch Verbond (Belgium) which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

And to the Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen (Belgium) which turned 30 last April.

EHF-FHE will be 10 years old officially on 29 October 2002. That is the date of the publication of its Constitution. The anniversary will be celebrated in October 2002 in Warsaw. More about this in the next Newsletter.

European Humanist Professionals

A three day workshop has been organised during the first week-end of September, in Amsterdam for professionals and volunteers involved in humanist counselling in prisons. The 25 participants were highly motivated and broad exchange of ideas and experience took place, particularly on whether it is a duty for humanist counsellors to play a part in the moral and ethical education and re-socialisation of the prisoner, on whether they are allowed or form a judgement about the act or crime committed and to what extent humanist counsellor have to get committed.

There were also lectures and a visit of the Bijlmer prison in Amsterdam.

This first workshop was met with so much enthusiasm that there will surely be a second one organised next year.

British Humanist Association (Great Britain)

They have launched an e-group to discuss educational issues : education@humanism.org.uk
Of course it is mainly concerned with the school system of England and Wales, but input from other countries is welcome.

Humanistisch Verbond (Belgium)

On 21st June, International Day of Humanism, the HV awarded the 7th Prize for Freethinking Humanism to Hubert Lampo, defender of freethinking values, novelist and essayist, considered as one of the most eminent authors in present-day Dutch literature. His works have been translated into many languages and some have been adapted for the screen.

EHF-FHE secretary general presented the congratulation of our federation to Hubert Lampo.

Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (Germany)

They will hold a conference on biotechnology in Berlin, on 11-12 October, at which EHF-FHE will take part.

Ligue Française de l'Enseignement et de l'Éducation permanente (France)

The triennial conference of the Ligue took place in Bordeaux, on the bank of the River Garonne, in an astonishing building which is a renovated maritime warehouse.

The numerous representatives of the federations, discussed in workshops on many issues related to teaching, under the general topic "To associate to do what"

EHF-FHE had been particularly invited to take part in the workshop on the European Union.

The orators presented a course of action akin to the one of EHF-FHE. For humanist messages to go through, it is essential to act in a concerted way on two levels with regard to the national institutions (parliament and government) as well as to the European Institutions.

We noted that several federations (Fédérations des œuvres laïques) have undertaken actions in the frame of the Union, exchanges of young people, development co-operation and other European programmes.

All together the federations have around 1.200.000 members.

Società laica e plurale (Italy)

In collaboration with the Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics and other organisations, a one-day conference is being organised in Rome, at the end of November on "2004: A humanist Constitution for Europe".

Spolocnost Prometheus (Slovakia)

They are setting up a meeting in Bratislava at the end of September where delegates of humanist groups of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia will present the situation of humanists and non denominational citizens in the four countries concerned, analyse the steps to be taken to improve and remove discriminatory treatment on national and international levels and draw up a resolution to be presented to national and international bodies.

Thinking freely about Europe (Belgium)

A lunch and debate is organised one a month in Brussels.

Information on the topics debated upon can be found on the web site of EHF-FHE www.humanism.be

Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics (Italy)

The Co-ordination Committee of UAAR has convened the Fourth Congress of the association in Florence, on 17 and 18 November 2001. The main theme is "Religions divide, humanism unites", there will be discussions on separation of Church and State in Italian and European institutions, of the "otto per mille" (8 per thousand – the Italian "Church tax"), of religious education in schools, ...

EHF-FHE Secretary general is to give a talk on the actions and activities of the federation with regards to the European Union and on the White Paper on European governance that was published by the European Commission in July.

Vapaa-ajattelijain Liitto ry (Finland)

The Union of Freethinkers of Finland is arranging an international seminar on civil ceremonies in Helsinki at the end of September. There will guests from all over Europe and also from Australia. The situation and the organisation of humanist ceremonies in different

countries will be presented (legal status, number of ceremonies and its influence on culture, education of officiants, guides and literature, ...). Each ceremony will also be dealt with: name giving, coming of age, marriage and same sex official registration, funerals.

News of the Federation

Leaflet

The leaflet presenting EHF-FHE is available in English and in French free from the secretariat. We will be pleased to send as you many as you need.

www.humanism.be

EHF-FHE web site is being reconstructed. You should be able to visit a more colourful and friendlier site soon.

The directory of websites and email addresses of European humanist associations is being updated. **Please send us any change or addition you wish to be made.**

e-groups

The Board decided at its last meeting in London to have two different e-groups to discuss matters related to Europe. One will be opened to EHF-FHE member organisations and the other one to anyone being a member of a humanist organisation anywhere in Europe.

EHF-FHE will thus be able to better define what are the main concerns of European humanism and humanists, to find out how to act and react in the most effective way on a wide range of issues (ethics, human rights, environment, European policies, ...).

To have your say on what is going on in Europe, contact ehffhe@yahoogroups.com

Civil society in Europe

EHF-FHE organised on 9 June, the day before the general assembly, in Ostend, a conference on "Civil Society in Europe – Role and action of EHF-FHE and of its members".

After the welcome address by President Steinar Nilsen, Vincent Obozinski showed why this seminar was being held at the right moment because of the important projects being developed in the European Union.

High level European experts talked more particularly on science and society, on the precautionary principle, on good governance, on the Charter of fundamental rights and the future Constitution of the European Union (Georges Ingber), on sustainable development (Philippe Bourdeau), on the European initiative "A soul for Europe" (Claude Wachtelaer, former EHF-FHE general secretary). Georges Liénard gave an overview of the European actions undertaken previously by the federation.

A summary of the seminar will be available.

Miscellaneous

International Bioethics Committee of UNESCO (IBC)

The eighth session of IBC, held in Paris from 12 to 14 September, was attended by EHF-FHE. Among the main topics of the conference, one can mention "ethics, intellectual property and genomics" and "protection of personal data" in relation with genetic data. Guidelines were proposed for this protection.

See Change Campaign

The "See Change" Campaign is an international effort to open a review of the "state" status of the Catholic church at the United Nations. The Holy See, the government of the Roman Catholic church, should participate in the UN in the same way as the world's other religions do - as a non-governmental organisation.

The "See Change" Broadside is a regular publication emailed to supporters of the campaign, It shows how the hierarchy of the Catholic church involves itself in public policy debates and, relying on sectarian religious positions, can, and does, obstruct progressive legislation.

If you have not already signed up for the campaign, please visit the web site www.seechange.org and click on "Sign a Postcard." You can also request campaign materials and sign your organisation up as an endorser.

Next newsletter

EHF-FHE is pleased to publish information you care to communicate.

For the next issue it should reach us **before November 30 2001**. Thank you !

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If you use pieces of information for publication would you please mention that it comes from the EHF-FHE Newsletter.

Thank you.