

Press release

The Lisbon Treaty

The 27 governments of the European Union have signed in Lisbon a treaty worked out behind the scenes and even more unintelligible for citizens than the former Constitutional Treaty (ECT), which excludes any possibility of referenda. This is a twofold setback for democracy.

As for substance, one must welcome the fact that the Treaty adopts the main institutional progressive proposals of the ECT; the fact that reference is made to the cultural, religious and humanist heritage, in the Treaty as in the Charter of fundamental rights; the fact that the latter becomes legally binding while the European Union commits itself to ratifying the European Human Rights Convention.

It is to be regretted that the member states unanimously agreed that Poland and the United Kingdom be allowed to opt out of the Charter. Also regrettable is the weakness of the social part of the Charter and of the Treaty, especially the weakness of the guarantees of implementation. As for the subject of peace, this regrettably appears in the Treaty not as a value but only as an aim of the Union. This entails no commitment to rejecting resort to war.

DIALOGUE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION WITH THE CONVICTION-BASED ORGANISATIONS MUST BE DEMOCRATIC

As regards the relationships of the Union with the Churches and non-confessional conviction-based organisations article 15 ter of the new Treaty takes up the terms of ex-article 52 of the ECT, to which the European Network Church on the Move has stated its opposition from the beginning. Indeed it provides by its mere existence a legal basis for the privileged treatment of conviction-based organisations and religious leaders in particular, who are unable to represent the diversity within their communities. Contrary to article (8 B, ex-47 ECT) on dialogue with civil society, article 15 ter does not require that the Union's interlocutors be representative, as is required in a democratic dialogue.

Article 15 ter is to be found no longer found in the chapter on participatory democracy but only in the provisions on the policies in the Treaty on the functioning of the Union. Does this mean that the Churches, which define themselves as special entities in the public sphere where they have a role to play, and the other conviction-based organisations do not belong to civil society in keeping with the principle of separation of religion and politics, a common value of Europe?

On the occasion of the signing of the Treaty, the European Network Church on the Move calls on EU institutions to dialogue with conviction-based organisations according to the same rules that apply to civil society associations and to consult not only religious institution *leaders* but also *associations* of religious, humanist, atheist or agnostic convictions.

Contact:

vi.bel@IOL.IT

hubertournes@orange.fr