

September 2007

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Word from the President

The summer holidays are already long behind us, with their joyous memories of getting together with family and friends, or simply taking a well-earned rest. But they were also darkly clouded (apart from the poor weather of our "washout summer"...) by a catalogue of horrific events, like child abuse, abductions and murders, and one murderous attack after another on innocent civilian families and children, or the huge fires that have caused so much suffering to our Greek friends. Our hearts go out to all the suffering families hit by disaster and destruction.

And now here we are in autumn. Schools and universities have started their new terms. And voluntary organizations are getting back into the swing; in our Confederation's case, it means re-mobilizing our energies around the common objective of working for families, regardless of our differences in nationality, religion, customs, incomes, disabilities, or health.

At this time, we have two big irons in the fire. I mean the two actions launched just ahead of summer which are now fully under way: the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) and the "Europe for Citizens" Programme.

At the start of July, William Lay wrote to all the Presidents of COFACE's member organizations to thank those who had acted on our suggestion of lobbying their Head of State or Government (it being a Conference of Governments) to see that the Summit of 21-22 June 2007 keeps in the new draft treaty the Charter of Fundamental Rights (many articles of which refer to the family, children or key aspects of family life) and article I-47 on participatory democracy. He was able to report that the campaign had succeeded, as both texts have been kept in the new draft treaty passed to the **Intergovernmental Conference** (IGC) at the end of the Summit.

The Portuguese Presidency opened the IGC on 23-24 July and hopes to get the draft treaty adopted at the Summit of 18-19 October. This is why William stressed (enclosing a form letter to help) the urgent need to further lobby the different Governments to promote the idea of including "and support for family life" among the Union's objectives. This is now in hand, pursued by COFACE and various member organisations that have already taken action.

This campaign was already tried at preceding IGCs and will face a stern test from many policy makers' continuing reluctance to endorse the concept of family. So we must keep hammering away at it, right up to 18 October!

A series of eight one-day workshops will be taking place from late August to late November run by eight COFACE member associations in six EU Member States. They tie in to the project that COFACE submitted to the European Commission last spring for financial support under the "**Europe for Citizens**" Programme.

The topics addressed in these eight sessions are wide-ranging and all link into one another around the "Citizenship/Family/Europe" triangle. The two workshops that have already taken place heard some remarkable personal accounts, in Calabria on people with disabilities, then in Brussels on violence between intimate partners.

The eight workshops and the recommendations to come out of them will be reported back to the final Conference in Brussels at the end of May 2008, where senior figures from the EU's Institutions will have an opportunity to listen to the key concerns of the front-line organisations behind this project, about citizenship, families and Europe.

Our very best wishes go to the six associations whose workshops are still to come! This is a truly great demonstration of considered and committed free expression reflecting the unique - and civic-minded - strength of individual character...

Yves Roland-Gosselin

1. What's new

COFACE has published the following Position on the Mattel Affair: **What about the CE Marking?**

As the European organisation of consumer families, COFACE has always expressed particular concern for issues relating to toy safety. On several occasions, COFACE has reacted to specific problems, such as on phthalates.

We are currently faced with the mass recall from the European market of toys marketed by an American firm, but manufactured in China, following the discovery of harmful matter in the paint.

The relevant firm, Mattel, immediately reacted to this public health hazard and committed itself to completely revise its surveillance and control procedures over its subcontractors. They also promised to reinforce safety checks on all their products before they are put on the market.

However, the fact remains that toys have been marketed carrying the CE marking and obviously not complying with European Union regulations and safety standards. Indeed, by using the EC marking, manufacturers declare that their products are in conformity with these standards.

COFACE demands that the terms for affixing the CE marking be re-examined. We regret the considerable confusion that the meaning of the CE marking maintains among consumers. Families have the right to know that this marking is in no way a sign of quality, as such. The current incident also proves that it is important that Community authorities exert more efficient controls over manufacturers/importers as to their own safety control processes, before marketing their products.

2. News from COFACE

- The last COFACE General Assembly meeting in Brussels on 8 May altered **article 3** to make it more inclusive of the values and principles espoused by the European Union (solidarity between the generations, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, gender equality, active citizenship,...).
- In July, we submitted an application for co-financing under the **Progress Programme** to "set up three-year partnerships with EU-level networks active in the field of combating social exclusion". The Commission's reply is expected within the next few weeks.
- The President of the European Commission, Mr José Manuel Barroso, has written to the Chairman of COFACE thanking him for the brochure on men's role in families and suggesting a meeting to give him a more detailed presentation on COFACE's work and concerns. This important meeting will be reported in the next issue of the Newsletter.



- COFACE-Handicap met on 3 July in AP³'s offices to put the very final touches to the European Carer's Charter and decide on its dissemination.
- The Consumer WG met on 17 September in Brussels to address headlining issues like lead paint in toys from China, and other more specific matters like the FLABEL (nutritional labelling) and SAFER INTERNET (new communication and information technologies) projects.
- The President and Director were invited to address UNAF's Administrative Council on 15 September in Paris. They gave a nearly hour-and-a-half-long presentation of COFACE's activities and had an interesting discussion with Council members. The meeting was part of UNAF's preparation of a major policy report on Europe to be ready for mid-2008 as France takes over the Presidency of the European Union.

3. News from its members



As part of the project on "**For an active European citizenship: Giving a voice to families**" (Europe for Citizens Programme) coordinated by COFACE, the 8 project partners - Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes (BE), Ligue des familles (BE), Family and Childcare Center (EL), Salud y Familia (ES), Unión de Centros de Acción Rural (ES), Väestöliitto (FI), UDAF Indre-and-Loire (FR) and Unione Famiglie Handicappati (IT) - are each to host a one-day workshop. Two have already been held.

- The first was on "**Inclusion for disabled persons and their families**", hosted by UFHA (IT) on 27 August in Calabria.
- The other was a "**Civic forum on intimate partner violence**" staged by Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes (BE) on 11 September in Brussels. Chairman Y. Roland-Gosselin attended the meeting and gave a short speech on the active European citizenship project.

Preparations are already in hand for a select seminar to be held on 10 December for Bureau members and organizers of the day workshops - which will all have been held by then - to make an initial assessment and map out the programme for the **final Conference** to be held on 26 and 27 May 2008 in Brussels.

4. Meetings

COFACE was invited to take part in the Conference hosted by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union on "**Reconciling Professional, Personal and Family Life. New Challenges for the Social Partners and for Public Policy**" in Lisbon on 12 and 13 July.

As the title suggests, it was mainly to hold a debate with the social partners and policymakers –especially local ones. The plenary sessions closely reflected this concern, being given over to social dialogue, flexicurity, and public sector and social partner initiatives. No input from the voluntary community –either national or European– was programmed into these plenary sessions. The only NGO contribution was to be found in two of the four workshops, where delegates from REVES (social economy) and the European Women’s Lobby had an opportunity to make a presentation.

The four workshops dealt respectively with social services, integrating reconciliation into the social dialogue, collective bargaining and European instruments for promoting gender equality.

COFACE through its Director made an intervention in the workshop on European instruments. He retraced the history of the Parental Leave Directive, pushed for by women’s and family groups from 1982 onwards. After more than 10 years of British government obstruction, the logjam was broken by the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty which came into force in 1993. The social partners then took up the issue and reached an agreement after the very first European-level collective bargaining ... completely sidelining the NGOs who initiated it and had a direct interest in the outcomes.

W. Lay said that this kind of thing must never happen again. Obviously, it was not that family associations were asking to be classed as social partners, for example, but that when topics for social partner negotiations impinge directly on the family sphere, a way should be sought of bringing families into the dialogue. The need to involve NGOs was included in the workshop reports to the second day’s plenary session.

COFACE also took advantage of its presence at this conference to hand out the brochures containing the recommendations that came out of its project on the Role of Men in Families. They went like hot cakes...! A word of thanks is due to the Social Platform for having brought the conference to our attention.

Agricultural Advisory Group meetings. COFACE experts:

- 21/06: "Agriculture and Environment". Paul Antony (UNAF, FR)
- 12/07: "Forestry and Cork". Bernard Vignon (CNAFC, FR)
- 16/07: "Quality of Agricultural Production". Simone Sitbon (UNAF, FR)
- 20/07: "Fruit and Vegetables". Helene Zographos-Meynaud (EL)

Other meetings

- 10/07: Social Platform Steering Group. W. Lay.
- 25/07: European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Study Group SOC/277 "**Promoting solidarity between generations**" (COM (2007) 244 final). COFACE expert to Group III, Mr Yves Coemans, Gezinsbond (BE).
- 6/09: Social Platform "**Social Policy**" Working Group, in Brussels. Lydie Gaudier (Ligue des familles, BE), representing COFACE, was elected Vice-Chair.
- 6/09: EESC Liaison Group. W. Lay.
- 11/09: Commission meeting with the European organisations in the "**Europe for Citizens**" Programme. W. Lay.
- 19/09: Meeting with **Belinda Pyke**, DG EMPL Director for Equality between men/women, action against discrimination and civil society. Y. Roland-Gosselin and W. Lay.

19/09: European Consumers Consultative Group (ECCG). N. Revenu (UNAF, FR).
20/09: **Platform on Obesity**. N. Molisse.
25/09: Commission meeting with the European networks active in tackling **social exclusion and discrimination**. W. Lay.
27-28/09: Conference "**IGC 2007: Organised civil society has its say on the future of Europe**" organised by the EESC. W. Lay, A. Pérez and M. Berdys.
28/09: COFACE Belgian Committee meeting at the Ligue des Familles.

5. Other news

Just a reminder that next year, COFACE will be celebrating its **50th birthday**. We are thinking hard about a new logo to be launched for the occasion. The Bureau will be looking at a range of proposals, and we shall probably be publishing a brochure to mark the event.

For the last four months, we have had Monika Berdys working with us on *expanding COFACE's membership*. She has already been in contact with a Bulgarian organisation and a Slovak organisation.

6. Forthcoming events

8/10: COFACE Bureau and Administrative Council
10/10: Briefing on the new approaches to policy on drinking, European Parliament. W. Lay.
10/10: Conference "We Care, Do You?" organised by Eurocarers and Parliament Magazine. Presentation of COFACE-Handicap's **European Carer's Charter** by Philippe Miet (APF, FR).
11/10: Presentation of COFACE-Handicap's European Carer's Charter to the meeting of the Commission's High Level Group on Disability, by Jacques Lodomez (AP³, BE).
11/10: Consultation meeting on funding under the "Europe for Citizens" Programme. European Commission. W. Lay.
13/10: Day workshop on "**Families in Europe**" organised by UDAF-Indre-and-Loire, partner in the Europe and citizens project. Tours (FR) Y. Roland-Gosselin and W. Lay.
16/10: Day workshop on "**Families with dependent members**" organised by UNCEAR (ES), partner in the Europe and citizens project. Guadalajara (ES).
16-17/10: 6th **Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion** at Ponta Delgada, S. Miguel, Azores. W. Lay and L. Gaudier (Ligue des familles, BE)
16/10: DG Agriculture Advisory Group seminar on **Common Agricultural Policy** simplification. N. Molisse.
17/10: Training "How our organisations can better reflect diversity in society - challenges and supports". Organised by the Social Platform. Mariana Isla (Salud y Familia, ES) will attend.
18-19/10: Informal European Summit, including adoption of the draft new EU Treaty.
22/10: Social Platform Steering Group (including adoption of a policy position on **demography**). W. Lay.

1/11: Day workshop on "**Men's role in families**" organised by KMOP (EL), partner in the Europe and citizens project. Athens.

7/11: Day workshop on "**Migrant Families and Equal Opportunities for Well-being**" organised by Väestöliitto (FI), partner in the Europe and citizens project. Helsinki. W. Lay will attend.

8-9/11: Conference on "Walking with Families" organised by EASPD, Lisbon. A.M. Comito.

14/11: Social Platform "Social Policy" Working Group. L. Gaudier (LDF, BE)

16/11: Day workshop on "**Recognize parental work and gender equality in social security**" organised by Ligue des familles (BE), partner in the Europe and citizens project. Brussels.

26/11: **Social Platform annual conference.** "Social NGOs getting ready for the Post Lisbon - Recommendations to address social and demographic change". Brussels.

27/11: Meeting of the High Level Group on Demography. W. Lay.

29/11: Day workshop on "**Romanian Families and Women in Spain: Rights and Chances as New EU Citizens**" organised by Salud y Familia (ES), partner in the Europe and citizens project. Barcelona.

4/12: Council of Ministers for Economic and Financial Affairs; agenda includes adoption of reduced VAT.

5-6/12: Council of EPSCO Ministers; agenda includes balanced gender roles in work, family and private life.

10/12: Bureau and select seminar with the organizers of the day workshops on "Citizenship, Family, Europe".

12-13/12: Visit to Slovakia organised by the Social Platform to meet Slovak NGOs. William Lay will be going.

13-14/12: European Summit of the Heads of State and Government.

18/12: Social Platform Steering Group. W. Lay.

19/12: Liaison Group of Civil Society, EESC. W. Lay.

20/12: EBIS (European Brain Injury Society) Conference on forensic expertise and brain injury. EBIS General Assembly. W. Lay.

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