

## European Free Thought Association

1. The European Free Thought Association (EFTA) was **set up** in 2007 in **order to support the European project and to defend the principles** emanating from the **Enlightenment**, in particular freedom of thought, conscience and opinion. Thus EFTA is fully in tune with the **European Charter of Fundamental Rights**<sup>1</sup> that each member state is bound to honour.

**EFTA** is present in 23 EU countries already and **rallies citizens** of all kinds, nationalities, origins, believers and non-believers, **who wish in a tangible way to support the edification of Europe and co-existence** within the Union. Thus **they want to bring about a feeling of belonging and of citizenship** so that people may look forward to a shared peaceful future.

**That is why EFTA**, qua non-confessional organisation, **champions secularism, meaning religions shouldn't interfere in politics**. This secularism doesn't seek in any way to reject religions, but rather their use for political purposes. In the same vein **EFTA** is alive to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and **rejects the rise of any form of fundamentalism**.

**EFTA members** share and **exchange** points of view on **matters to do with society, economics, culture and politics**, not just **to get involved in European civil society**, but also **in order to participate in the dialogue between the European institutions and religious communities, philosophical associations and non-confessional organisations**.

**To form their opinion** about **European realities and policies** **EFTA members are guided** not only by **the tradition of the Enlightenment** (subjecting every idea, value or behaviour to critical and meaningful analysis) but also **avail themselves of the keys** given below (sub 3). The aim of the exercise is, with the help of reason, to assess whether social thinking tallies with social reality, in order to come up with the best provisions for the majority.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)

Anyone in EFTA can create tools for spreading updated Enlightenment values in Europe.

## 2. Some of EFTA's activities

### ○ Colloquia

#### • At the European Parliament :

- "Women in today's Europe" (March 2010)

#### • At the European Commission :

- "The fight against poverty and social exclusion" (November 2011)
- "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity for the countries of Southern Europe" (April 2012)
- "A new enchantment for citizens' Europe" (April 2013)
- Thanks to EFTA's action the Union's guidelines for promoting freedom of religion or conviction in third countries were amended as follows : The EU shall protect the rights of non-believers, agnostics and atheists as well as the fundamental right to give up one's religion or beliefs. (2013)
- "The free trade agreement between the EU and the USA : an Atlantic Partnership for the benefit of all?" (March 2015)
- Following on from the work of the reflection group on *A different take on Europe*, EFTA representatives submitted a preliminary report on the subject to a member of the Commission (early 2018). Three other working groups continue to work on *the Future of Work*, *Fundamental rights* and *Education*.
- A complaint made in 2013 to the European ombudsman led in 2017 to non-believers being represented on the European ethics' group for the first time.

### ○ Conferences with debate about Europe with EFTA members.

### ○ Other activities and achievements

As **political events** occur and important humanist issues arise **EFTA practises direct democracy** and asks members to send e-mails on specific issues to European political leaders. **Three examples :**

1. EFTA has on a number of occasions denounced the antidemocratic excesses in Hungary and Turkey by addressing the presidents of the European institutions and political groups in the EP.
2. In the Lautsi case (about the display of religious signs in the public domain) EFTA managed to stop a resolution by the Christiandemocratic and socialist purporting to authorise in all EU countries the display of religious signs in the public arena.
3. EFTA organised a vigorous campaign against the 'confirmation' by the EP of the nomination of Maltese Commissioner Borg because of his unacceptable views on the right to divorce, homosexuality , rights of women etc.

Finally EFTA complained to the European Ombudsman about president Barroso for *maladministration* in appointing the members of the European Ethics' group where Christians were overrepresented whereas there were no secular representatives in that capacity.

### 3. Reading keys - a summary

A European policy is legitimate and credible if it :

- + **strengthens the rights and obligations** of European **citizens** *while consolidating the ethic of co-responsibility (interdependence) incumbent on all;*
- + **acknowledges there is one single Humanity;** **enables each European citizen to express his/her convictions, to differ, to oppose, provided this rivalry is fruitful and doesn't imperil the fundamental rights of other European citizens;**
- + **enshrines the principles above as part of a "Europeanisation" of civil and political rights – some of which are in the treaties already and are part of the *acquis* - but also economic, social, cultural and environmental rights (for all living things);**
- + **ensures that in European elections fundamental rights and values as laid down in the European treaties are recognised and respected;**

- + goes together with a rewriting of the concept and mechanisms of subsidiarity as contained in the Lisbon treaty;
- + moves towards an integration model that abandons the postulate of the primacy of economic freedoms over all others and adds the criteria for solidarity and distributive justice arising from the political community. *“Social rights are necessary, independently of the objective of free competition, and shall be based on membership of the political community”<sup>2</sup>*;
- + based on measures for social justice and decent work;
- + lays down rules, methods and reliable indicators regarding employment and social imbalances, with which to anticipate the social impact of asymmetrical economic shocks and to avoid social and fiscal dumping;
- + ensures the balance between private and public goods and interests.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert SALAIS , page 325