

Speech by John Bruton at the Convention on Future of Europe
on Friday 22nd March 2002

As any opinion pollster will tell you, the way you frame a question can pre-determine the answer.

The question we should be asking ourselves in this debate is not "what do people need from Europe?" but rather "what do the people need from governments at whatever level they operate?"

Then, arising from that answer, to go on to ask "at what level of government can what people need best be done?".

In my opinion, the first thing people need is personal security – in other words freedom from war, and freedom from crime.

The second thing people need from government is the means of making a living – the chance to have a job or, if they cannot work, decent social support.

The third thing that people need from government is fairness, and democratic involvement.

I believe that personal security cannot be achieved without action **both** at national **and** European level. The means of making a living cannot be provided without action both at national and at European level. And finally, we will make no progress at any level of government without fairness and democratic involvement.

So, let us avoid sterile debates about "federalism" and "super-states", and the pursuit of elusive concepts like "sovereignty".

Nor should we apologise for idealism about European integration. Remember what we are against. As the Laeken Declaration put it, we must oppose the "forces of religious fanaticism, ethnic nationalism, and racism".

The European Union is a huge achievement, unique in world history. It came about because some visionary people saw that nationalism, and the idolatry of the nation state, had given us two world wars. These visionaries did not wait for focus groups and opinion polls to tell them that it was time to move forward. They led from the front. This Convention must do likewise.

As Jurgen Meyer put it yesterday, "Unity -v- Diversity" is not a helpful debate. As Hans van Mierlo put it, we must create a Europe that people will identify with emotionally or, in Gianfranco Fini's words "a sense of belonging to Europe must be created".

We won't convince others unless we are convinced ourselves. We will not succeed simply by splitting the difference between opposing views, rather by finding new ways of framing the question so we move beyond the things that divide us. As George Katiforis said we are moving from the Europe of diplomacy to the Europe of democracy.

The big difference between national and European government is that the public feel that they elect, and can sack, their national government. They do not feel they can elect, or can sack, the government of Europe. That is the problem. It is not that people do not have a chance to vote on European questions. They vote for their members of the European Parliament. They vote for the members of the European Council of Ministers. They even vote for the people who select the Commission.

But even while casting all those votes, they do not feel that they elect, or can sack, the government of Europe in the same way as they can elect and sack their national government.

Our task in the next year is to find a way whereby Europe's people will feel that they - not the elites, they - as citizens, elect ***their*** government in Europe just as they elect their government in their own country.