

**SPEECH BY MR V. GISCARD D'ESTAING
CHAIRMAN OF THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION**

**AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING
OF THE YOUTH CONVENTION**

Brussels, 10 July 2002

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Mr Chairman of the Committee on Youth,
Commissioner,

Young members of the Convention,

As Chairman of the European Convention, it is my task to open this meeting of the Youth Convention.

On 28 February, at the inaugural meeting of the European Convention, I suggested holding a Convention for the Young People of Europe, which would hold a meeting modelled on our own Convention.

That Convention is meeting here today.

Why, you may ask, are we holding a Youth Convention?

We have been given the task of saying what the Europe of the future might look like.

We are aware that we are building it primarily for you.

You are the future of Europe!

It is crucial that we hear the views and ideas of the Europeans of 2020.

The Europe of the future belongs to you. You will live and work in it. You will bring it to life and most certainly develop it even further.

Tomorrow's Europe will be different from Europe as we know it today and as envisaged at the outset.

It will follow on directly from the initial project, which was very bold and courageous when we remember the circumstances in which it was launched, but will have to adapt to new situations.

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The project for the 1950s was to bring peace and reconciliation to our continent. It was also to establish a common market, by dismantling the ubiquitous trade barriers, a market which would mark a step towards gradual European union.

Those times are far behind us now. But you can still see a little way back, just a generation or two, amazed at your presence here, members of your family who experienced the old Europe's troubles. They lived through those troubles and in many cases were victims of them.

What a long, long way we have come in fifty years!

The idea of war between Europeans, the stuff of which our history books and graveyards are full, has been banished from our minds, dispelled, eradicated.

Peace and reconciliation have taken root in Europe.

You can testify to that and show your appreciation of them!

Europe has equipped itself with a Parliament, elected by universal suffrage, which is playing host to you today, a Commission whose role it is to speak for Europe's

common good, and a Council bringing together Heads of State or Government at set intervals, to map out broad policy guidelines.

What is more, since 1 January, most Europeans have been using a single currency, the one you have in your pockets, not enough of it, you will no doubt say.

That seems all well and good.

So why do we need to go further?

Because Europe has changed.

And because the world, too, has changed.

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Europe has expanded.

We started off with a small group of founding States, in Western Europe, represented by young Convention members here in this chamber.

That core group has grown, stage by stage, from six to fifteen States.

Then, since 1990, the collapse of the Soviet empire has ushered in a new era, one that at last makes possible the unification of the European continent!

Our Convention brings together representatives of all Member States and of all candidate countries.

It is the only European Union institution in which they work together.

We welcome them with open arms: please show them your appreciation!

That enlarged European Union, with a population of nearly 500 million, will form the third largest body of humanity in the world, after China and India.

It will also be a very diverse group of people, with their many languages, their cultures, their ways of life, their laws and, at least to begin with, their different levels of economic development.

Let no-one underestimate the difficulties of the challenge posed by the organisation on a lasting, democratic basis – unprecedented in history! – of a Union of more than twenty-five States, each with its own historical identity.

The institutions and the means of action of the resulting large family, bearing the full brunt of that "weight of numbers", need to be adjusted, to make them easier to understand, more effective and more democratic.

That is the first task for our Convention.

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But the world, too, has changed!

Globalisation, brought about by instant communications, fast travel and intensive trade, is having a great impact on our way of life, the location of our activities, our culture and our social welfare systems. It forces upon us a rigidly orthodox mindset. In tearing down boundaries, it holds out both opportunities and risks.

Let me give you two examples:

On the opportunity side, in March I travelled to Shanghai by scheduled flight, without any stopover, on a European-built aircraft, which would have been unthinkable thirty years ago, as none of the European countries in isolation, even the largest of them, could have achieved that result.

On the risk side, we hear daily of cross-border crime and mafia-style trafficking in women, children and illegal immigrants, lured into buying their ticket to heaven on earth. It is impossible to combat such trafficking if police and legal action comes up against the stumbling block of borders.

In this world, coming to be organised on a continental scale, how can Europe make its voice heard, put across its message and stick up for its interests?

Certainly not by acting disjointedly.

If Europe has a message to convey, an experience of freedom and tolerance to disseminate and a solidarity to share, the only way it can do so is by speaking with one voice on the international scene.

So how are we to organise Europe's presence in the world?

That is the second task for our Convention.

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These are the challenges facing the European Convention and this is why we need you.

You are here to enlighten us.

We need your fresh ideas and your freedom of thought.

"Mankind's true treasure is the bloom of youth", as the poet Ronsard once wrote.

How you organise your work will be entirely up to you.

Freedom of speech and tolerance will be the only rules.

Those Convention members who selected you wanted you to be a diverse group: in national origin, language and professional experience. While many of you are

students, others have already embarked on their careers, as craftsmen, employees or educators.

They wanted you to come straight from the real world, so that your message can be a heartfelt one. They fixed an age range, from eighteen to twenty-five, so that you would all be on an equal footing.

It heartens me to see that there are slightly more young women among you than young men.

What we expect of you is that you express your personal convictions – what your heads and your hearts are telling you, not the slavish repetition of well-worn slogans.

What do you expect of Europe?

How do you think it should be organised? What should be the roles of the Union, its Member States and the regional and local authorities?

Which faults must it remedy and which must it avoid?

What should be its place in the world?

Should it be given the means of defending itself?

Tell us what you expect from our work and advise us on how best to move our Convention forward.

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When I opened the Convention, I called on the Convention members to dream of Europe and persuade others to share that dream.

Those words might have raised a few smiles, but the message was clear.

I ask the same of you today!

The talent for dreaming, that marvellous skill which can transform the world in a twinkling, is the privilege of youth.

If young Britons, Germans, Frenchmen or Dutchmen had come together sixty years ago, they would have dreamed of peace. That dream has now become a reality.

If young Czechs, Hungarians, Latvians or Poles had been asked twenty years ago what they were dreaming of, they would have said: freedom, independence for

their countries and an end to the division of Europe. Now they are living out that dream.

Tell us what your dreams are for twenty years hence!

As you know, we have to draw up a document for the future – a constitution or, if you prefer, a constitutional treaty for Europe.

Inspire us with the enthusiasm to draw up that document by becoming our dream partners in the Convention!

You are the citizens of the Europe of the future.

Start to exercise your rights and duties as such here and now.

I am happy to give you the floor.

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But before you speak, I would ask you to listen to the representatives of the European institutions: the European Parliament and the Commission.

Ms Thorning-Schmidt, one of the youngest members of the Convention, will say a few words about the Danish Presidency.

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