

**Speech by Prof. Romano Prodi**  
**President of the European Commission**  
**Opening session of the Convention on the future of Europe**  
**European Parliament**  
**Brussels, 28 February 2002**

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are times when peoples are called on to affirm and define their reasons for being together.

For the peoples of our Europe such a moment has arrived.

You, the representatives of the States, institutions and peoples of Europe have come together in this Convention today because integration has been more successful than we could ever have hoped.

You are together here because a whole continent is considering its own future.

It is your task to find the answers, answers worthy of the prize at stake.

The central question you are called upon to answer is not technical.

It goes far beyond simple mechanisms, rules and institutional structures.

Because Europe is far more than just that.

Fifty years ago, clear-headed, courageous and far-sighted men succeeded in embarking on a totally new course.

Those men chose reconciliation rather than war, peace based on interdependence rather than mutual destruction, the rule of law rather than the "might is right" approach. They laid the foundations for a Community of peoples and States.

Completely new supranational institutions were constructed and, in the course of time, consolidated.

Working alongside the Member States meeting in the Council, there is a Commission to safeguard general European interests, a Parliament elected by universal suffrage to represent the people of Europe and a Court of Justice to ensure that the rule of law prevails.

This collaboration has created a new European identity.

It has encouraged exchange on an unprecedented scale.

It has enabled and produced stability and growth.

And lastly, it has brought about the birth of the euro, which has been welcomed with enthusiasm all over Europe.

Thirteen years have elapsed since the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, who until then had been deprived of their liberty, took their futures into their own hands and chose the way of democracy.

Today, those peoples whose representatives I welcome with deep feeling and in friendship - are asking to join with us.

We must answer this request with a firm yes, renewing and extending the European political pact.

The flaws in Community integration which definitely exist and must be ironed out are nothing when compared with what we have managed to build and what we can and must still achieve.

The enlarged European Union, Greater Europe can be a success.

We have the capacity to make it happen.

But what is the project for the Europe of the future?

I believe that it means meeting these four challenges.

Firstly, as Europeans, we must take our share of the responsibility for peace and development in the world.

Indeed, the future of the world is at stake, the lives of millions of human beings forced to live in indescribable poverty and the fate of the innocent, who are forced to pay the highest price for senseless wars.

And none of our States, acting alone, can do this.

As Europeans, we must also defend a balanced model of society able to reconcile economic prosperity and solidarity.

Our prosperity and way of life are closely linked to the balance between growth, social justice and environmental protection.

And our capacity to create growth and employment is dependent on the single currency and the single market, both of which are based on a common system of rules.

Furthermore, as Europeans, we must guarantee freedom while adhering to the principles of security.

Our history and our culture do not allow us to separate security, justice and liberty.

When dealing with terrorism and crime that do not stop at borders or with large-scale migrations, we can only act on a European scale.

Lastly, we Europeans must stake our futures on making Europe a centre of intellectual and scientific influence and of innovation.

Because in the field of intelligence Europe cannot allow itself to be left behind.

Once you have defined the project for the Europe of the future, then, and only then, Members of the Convention, will be the moment to address the more specifically institutional problems.

Let me share a few brief thoughts with you on this subject.

We have to give ourselves a Constitution, which marks the birth of Europe as a political entity.

However, we must not forget the unique nature of European integration.

The European Union is unique in that it is a union of peoples and States. The real aim is not to build a superstate. Why do so now, at a time when classical State models are increasingly incapable of managing globalisation? The real aim, a combination of realism and vision, is to continue developing this unique structure towards an increasingly advanced supranational democracy.

A European democracy based on the peoples and the States of Europe.

To do so, we have to adapt the major principles underlying our national democratic traditions to the unique structure of Europe. These are:

- the separation of powers;
- majority voting;
- public debate and a vote by the people's elected representatives on all legal texts;
- approval of taxes by Parliament.

The Union's decision-making system needs to be overhauled.

We need new, simpler and more transparent procedures for taking and implementing decisions.

Tasks and responsibilities currently assumed at Union level can and must be reviewed and devolved to the Member States. The Commission will not shirk its responsibilities and is ready to play its part, to change in accordance with Europe's new needs. It is ready to redefine its own tasks to take on new responsibilities in fields where the future of Europe is at stake. It is also ready to give up part of its powers if this contributes to the greater common good. All the Institutions here represented have in fact the duty to call themselves into question in the context of this Convention.

The Commission is the guardian of the Treaties.

This means ensuring that the European Union evolves in a way that is true to itself.

It does not mean preserving at all cost what time calls on us to change.

While recognising and respecting the great cultural and spiritual traditions that are at the heart of Europe, we must work to bring about a genuine reform of the Union.

A reform that is both far-reaching and faithful to the great principles that have provided the basis for our success.

We must move towards "an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe" because young Europeans will be unable to identify with a limited, straitjacketed project.

- We must share sovereignty if we are able to exercise it in any real sense (as we have done in the case of the currency).
- We must recognise the need for institutions which are responsible for the general interest.
- We must ensure that all States are treated equally.

Members of the Convention,

Europe is not an alliance. It is the shared home of the citizens of Europe. It is the new protagonist of the new century.

For this reason it cannot be based on the laws of the few largest, strongest or most senior members of the European club.

The European Union is a "union of minorities" where no State may have the right to impose itself on others.

It cannot be satisfied with being a loose coordination incapable of resisting strong pressures.

Fifty years ago, Jean Monnet promoted the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, convinced that an institution entrusted with defending a higher interest should ensure that everyone fulfilled one's undertakings.

On the basis of this conviction you, the Members of the Convention, will need to promote solid institutions.

The Union is not, nor should it become a new League of Nations, reduced to impotence by selfishness and the right of veto.

The European Union offers a harmonious model of supranational democracy.

It is the only real attempt to globalise democratically, in such a manner as to provide rights and growth.

For this reason it can play a very special role in the world today and tomorrow.

I am confident that you will succeed in giving our continent the institutions its unique position requires, institutions in keeping with its past and capable of meeting the challenges we face in tomorrow's world.

Within the Convention, the Commission will be represented by Commissioners Barnier and Vitorino. It will provide its full and enthusiastic contribution, drawing on all its own experience and expertise.

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