

Brussels, 28 February 2002

**Address of Mr Pat COX, President of the European Parliament
on the occasion of the solemn opening of the
Convention on the Future of Europe**

On behalf of the European Parliament I have great pleasure in welcoming you to our Chamber today – to the place where the idea of this Convention was born. I stake that claim now because we wish you great success and we know success will have many fathers.

In October 2000, before the Treaty of Nice was concluded, the European Parliament voted a report on the constitutionalisation of the European Treaties and called for the establishment of a Convention. Then we thought a Convention was desirable. After the Treaty of Nice the European Parliament was convinced that a Convention was a necessity.

In the annals of European Treaty reform, today marks a decisive and revolutionary step forward for European democracy and the parliamentary method.

This Convention strikes a blow for openness and transparency, for innovation and creativity.

Fifty years ago a generation of European leaders, after a devastating war that divided our continent, saw all too clearly what was, but they were prepared to dream of what could be. They had the courage of their European convictions. They opened for Europe a pathway to reconciliation and progress which none had walked before. We are the beneficiaries of that legacy and of their foresight.

Today our generation of Europeans is summoned here to answer the call of service to Europe. I am especially pleased that in representative terms this Convention is truly continental in scale. I welcome in particular to this constitutional table our friends and colleagues from the candidate states. Our challenge, your challenge, is also a generational one:

- For our place and for this time to define and to redefine Europe's contemporary public purpose, its added value and its global responsibilities;
- to chart our way forward,
- so that what we do and how we do it is efficient, open and democratically accountable and above all relevant in a meaningful way to the lives of our peoples.

The European Parliament attaches a particular significance to dialogue with citizens and civil society. We would urge you not just to be a talking but also a listening Convention.

Our earnest wish is that this Convention should pave the way for a permanent dialogue with our peoples, the social partners, civil society, states and regions.

By following the parliamentary method your work will be on the public record, beneath the public gaze and will be carried simultaneously on the internet through video-streaming on the European Parliament web site. It is a signal of the more open Europe which you are called upon to deliver.

In contemplating our common future, we should respect what has worked to serve Europeans' best interests in the past. On matters of institutional balance and prerogatives the European Parliament will emphasise the need conserve intelligently without being conservative.

The ultimate test of the Convention being launched here today will be its ability to harness a collective wisdom and will; to forge a balanced and practical reform of what we do in common as Europeans and how we do it; and to do so in terms that will commend themselves decisively to the next Intergovernmental Conference on Treaty reform.

The European Parliament, as an active stakeholder and facilitator of this process, wishes you well.

Behind the Presidency, you see the image of Europe represented by the flag with twelve stars. We are politicians so, of course, we must be pragmatic and keep our feet on the ground; but nothing says that we cannot look to those stars in front of you today and dream our dreams about the common future we wish to imagine and create.

Speaking of dreams I conclude on this special day with a quotation from the Irish Nobel Laureate for Literature –William Butler Yeats

"I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams".
