

## ***As Delivered***

Speech for John Bruton TD  
Convention on the Future of Europe  
Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April

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Mr Chairman

There is Mr Chairman a real danger, as we start our debate, that we become too involved too soon not in the task Europe is setting out to fulfil, but in the question of how these tasks are to be divided up between institutions at Union, at national or at local level. Institutions, at whatever level, are there to serve the needs and objectives of the citizens. Democracy is about values, about citizen involvement and about shared purposes, and it is politics which determine these – not institutions as such.

The very structure of the Laeken declaration seems to take a rather reductionist approach to the democratic challenge facing the Union. It assumes that some opaque deal, redistributing legal competences between institutions, will satisfy people's demand for democratic involvement. That will not work.

I was struck by a recent Eurobarometer poll which showed that, in almost all EU countries, the public had less trust in their national institutions than in European institutions. If local government had been included in the poll, I believe it would have fared little better than national institutions.

The truth is that we have, not so much a crisis of confidence in European institutions, as a crisis of confidence in political institutions at all levels. Therefore redistributing

or redefining competences as between different types of political institutions will in itself not restore confidence..

The Laeken Declaration says citizens want their European institutions to be "less unwieldy and rigid", but the declaration does not reflect on whether national or local governments might also be accused of being unwieldy, or of being rigid.

Rather than ask the question "would you give the Union more tasks", we should be asking ourselves what tasks do people want performed by government at any level, whether it be at Union, at national or at local level.

Rather than ask ourselves "what criteria do you use for deciding what missions should be carried out at Union level", we should be asking ourselves what criterion should be use for deciding, what government should do, at any level, and what should be left to private endeavour, whether it be at Union, national or local.

My view is that people expect government, at every level, to provide them with

- security        against crime, against war and against arbitrary actions;
- opportunity    to work and contribute economically, in freedom;
- solidarity        which cares for the weak

In a world of global trade, global disease, global environmental threats and global crime, the reality is that security, opportunity and solidarity can only be provided by governments working in harmony and debate at all levels: Union, national and local.

Mr President, the Nice Treaty Referendum in Ireland was defeated not by those who voted against it, but by those who stayed at home and did not vote. They stayed at home because they simply did not understand what they were being asked to vote for, and felt that they could not vote at all in these circumstances.

How can we give our people security, opportunity and solidarity? That is what this debate really should be about -rather than about shifting legal responsibility from one political institution to another. Solving people' problems, not passing them from one place to another, should be our goal.