

## **INTERVENTION BY THE RT HON PETER HAIN MP: CONVENTION MEETING, 15 APRIL 2002**

### **MISSIONS OF THE EU**

The world we live in today demands a “stronger EU acting more effectively”. But as we look to the future, continuing public consent to the missions of the EU, will require more clarity about who does what. As Romano Prodi told us when he talked of a two-way street, there may be some competences which should be taken out of the Treaty altogether. But most importantly we must lay the foundations for tackling the challenges of the future.

We must preserve Europe's ability to adapt quickly to new challenges and to address old issues in new, innovative ways. It was the flexibility of our present system which allowed us to react to new political realities after 11 September. The world changed, and we were able to change our policies. That flexibility is worth preserving.

But people need to know that how we organise our health and education systems, choose what public services to deliver, design our welfare state to tackle poverty and insecurity – that the big questions of national politics will remain the preserve of national and regional governments and parliaments.

One suggestion is to define a catalogue of competences. That certainly has the advantage of clarity; everyone would know where they stood. But, it would create a rigid, static, legalistic body of rules which blocked the kind of flexibility that, for example, allowed us to tackle asylum problems at a Community, rather than a nation state, level.

No - our approach should be to set out principles deciding who is responsible for what. In particular, we should make more explicit the understanding that powers not delegated to the EU remain the preserve of the member states. And we need to think carefully how to do this – whether we agree a principle, or we add a precise description of the areas reserved for member states (if we can do so without sacrificing flexibility). Then we should create a political mechanism ensuring that those principles are respected, and brought closer to our citizens by involving national parliamentarians, perhaps alongside the European Parliament, with their judgements enforceable in law.

This means:

Subsidiarity - the EU acting to achieve something the member states cannot do alone, ensuring we can work together to stop terrorists and criminals exploiting loopholes to attack our freedoms and evade justice. But letting us each choose our system of policing, our body of law, our sentencing policy.

Proportionality - taking the lightest and most appropriate action necessary to achieve the objectives of our missions. Let's protect workers through a Europe wide platform of minimum standards, but let's do so in a way that enables people to find work and get off welfare.

This approach allows us to keep the range of instruments to deliver objectives: to choose either detailed legislation when we need a common standard; or framework legislation when we can use different methods to achieve a common objective, or non-legislative methods such as benchmarking or exchange of best practice when local flexibility is needed.

Flexibility, diversity and dynamism are at the heart of the European Union's record of success. But let's be more accountable, more comprehensible. Let's build on our success.