

EU CONVENTION 21 March 2002

Speech by Peter Hain, British Minister for Europe

Our task is nothing less than the creation of a new constitutional order for a new united Europe.

It must be a Europe of full employment, social justice democracy and human rights. A Europe which is a leader in the world, with Britain a leading European power, to banish international poverty, injustice and oppression.

Britain wants to play its full and constructive role in this Convention which is exciting, bold, and unique, representing as it does the new united Europe of 25 and more members.

I want us to build on Europe's successes: of 50 years of peace, stability and prosperity, of extraordinary achievements like the single market and the Euro. But we all know that an institutional architecture devised for 6 nations must be reformed to work for 25 or more.

Britain wants the EU to have stronger political leadership through a radically reformed European Council giving strategic direction. We want a stronger Commission too, perhaps with fewer, more focused Commissioners with influential Deputies to ensure each country is represented. We are also willing to support increased influence for the Parliament, and want to see a more effective means of involving national parliamentarians.

Women and men in the shopping centres, pubs and clubs of my Neath constituency in South Wales do understand why co-operation at a European level is important for their personal prosperity, security and environment. But as the world becomes more global, people are thinking more local. They only want Europe to act when it genuinely has something extra to add.

They want the EU:

- To be doing the things people care about, that are relevant to *their* daily lives rather than of interest to those who work or meet in Brussels.
- To work only on the issues where working together is better than working alone
- to combat cross border crimes like drug and people trafficking, but not to tell us how to police the streets
- to agree limits to the industrial pollution affecting our continent, but not to tell us whether we can build roads or houses on individual sites
- to provide opportunities for our students to study abroad, but not to tell us how to run individual schools

So we want reforms to address Europe's delivery deficit, our lack of democratic accountability and the growing gap between Europe's institutions and its citizens.

That is our challenge. And it means:

- stronger institutions - but with the balance between them maintained
- stronger instruments to deliver our objectives - but retaining a diversity of means of cooperation to reflect the evolving needs of the modern world
- clearer and simpler Treaties - but retaining the crucial checks and balances we have negotiated over the years
- a more open way of working - but not at the expense of our ability to negotiate and reach agreement.

So I am coming to this Convention committed to thinking radically to create a better Europe, founded on the values we all share and projecting these with a stronger voice in the world.

But I've also come to listen. There are British ideas for Europe's institutional development. But there's no British blueprint. And I want us to draw contributions from all parts of this Convention, so that we can produce some genuinely collective proposals for a reunited Europe which delivers for its citizens and not just for its leaders.

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