

Statement by Mr Henrik Hololei
Alternate Member of the Convention
Government of Estonia
on Simplification

5-6 December 2002, Brussels

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The task of simplification is not simple. It has become something of a European cliché that simplification is actually as difficult as it can get. This fact gives special meaning to the excellent results achieved under the chairmanship of Mr. Amato and I join all others in congratulating him for his good work. Also the measures proposed to enhance the quality of legislation are substantiated and deserve support.

The conclusions of the working group are presented in a clear and logical way. The main recommendations of the final report – reducing the number of instruments alongside with setting up a clearer hierarchy of legislation and abolishing the co-operation procedure are most welcome and could make the Union more comprehensible to its citizens.

However, there are a few points that need further consideration.

First, on co-decision and qualified majority voting. I support one of the main aims of the final report of the working group, namely that the qualified majority voting in the Council and co-decision in the European Parliament should become standard procedures. However, I do not agree that it would be advisable to strive to use of the QMV in the Council in all matters where co-decision is used in the European Parliament and vice versa. Although in theory this would certainly help the citizens to understand the working of the Union better as the number of combinations of legislative procedures would be significantly reduced, again in practice, simplification is not that simple.

Still I believe that the scope of application of the co-decision and QMV should be enlarged on a case-by-case basis and no cross-cutting are possible. There are areas, which are too sensitive for Member States to give up their powers. I must acknowledge that the final report refers to certain sensibilities but it nevertheless does not give up the aim of full concordance between qualified majority and co-decision. I am referring here for instance to social□policy and taxation, where the principle of unanimity should continue to apply. Also we do not support the replacement of the assent procedure by co-decision in the field of regional policy (decisions on structural funds and the Cohesion Fund).

One of the points of the report that has raised most discussion is the distinction between the obligatory and non-obligatory expenditure. I believe that the issue is about more than just this distinction. It is just as well about the institutional balance. While it is certainly in the interest of democracy and transparency that the European Parliament should gain more powers and unnecessary complications of the decision-making system be abolished, one should also guarantee the Member States a full and meaningful input into the expenditure side of the budget. I must admit that I do not at

the moment have a ready-made solution, so I am looking forward to good proposals on the matter.

Finally, I agree with the reasoning behind the suggestion that we should reduce the size of the Conciliation Committee. However, I would like to stress that when giving the right to decide on the number of members to the Council and the European Parliament, the principle of full equality between the Member States should be taken into account.

Thank you for your attention!