

**Contribution by Dr Dimitrij Rupel,
Slovenian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister's Representative to the European
Convention,
at the 15th meeting of the European Convention
Brussels, 6 and 7 February 2003**

The area of social affairs is crucial to the solidarity and cohesive development of the European Union. The European Union must not strive for economic prosperity alone, but also for a high level of social security based on solidarity between every group: the employed, disabled, old, young and those socially excluded.

If the European Union is to become the common home of all European nations, its constitutional treaty must also contain the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The European Union's aims in the social sphere – sustainable development, full employment and a high level of social security – constitute a global vision for human development and our environmental responsibility.

As regards competences in the area of social affairs, we agree that nation states bear primary responsibility for a just social security and the protection of social rights, while the European Union's role lies in eliminating negative consequences of competition that could be to the detriment of people and their fundamental rights. The European Union should only be involved in removing discrepancies between social systems and legislations to an extent that will permit the fluid movement of individuals from one country to another, with the social rights assumed in any European state being maintained.

We assess cooperation between Member States with the open coordination method as an appropriate approach to cooperation in new areas (pensions, fight against poverty and social exclusion). However, this method must not impact on the existing distribution of competences in the areas of social affairs.

Dialogue and cooperation with social partners must be maintained and extended to areas in which the social partners could themselves reach agreements on the basis of Commission proposals.

The European Union is no longer an association of countries whose only objective is economic stability. As values and objectives have expanded, the basis of European integration has become not only economic stability but also social justice. The broad guidelines of economic policy should not then simply direct development towards the accumulation of ever greater profit, but also towards increasing the levels of employment and social inclusion.