

Betr.: **Nationale Debatte über die Zukunft Europas:**
– **Slowakei**

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL DEBATE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE EU IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

WORK OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EUROPEAN FUTURE OF SLOVAKIA

Arrangements

Slovakia's response to the call of the European Council in Nice for a wider and deeper debate on the future of the Union involving both Member and Candidate States was the idea of convening a national convention. It was presented following the Nice summit at a Konrad Adenauer Foundation Colloquium on 13 December 2000 in Bratislava. The convention should provide a suitable forum for Slovak citizens interested in discussing the challenging questions of Slovakia's future in the EU.

The objective of the Slovak National Convention is to foster a nation-wide discussion on the questions defined by the Declarations on the Future of the Union from Nice and Laeken, which have direct impact on our national interests. Thus there has been a special emphasis on the composition of the National Convention. Since the National Convention should reflect the entire spectrum of our society, it is made up of representatives of the main political parties, academic circles, churches, interest groups, trade unions, municipalities and regions as well as non-governmental organisations.

Each session of the convention is summoned by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Kukan and chaired by the State Secretary Ján Figel', who is also the representative of the Government of the Slovak Republic to the Convention. From March 2002 on the representatives of the Slovak Republic in the European Convention take part in the sessions too. In order to provide support for the work of the convention and draw up background materials a working group has been established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic including representatives from several NGOs.

Progress and main issues

The inaugural meeting of the National Convention was held on 14 May 2001 and was attended by the Chairman of the National Council Slovak Republic Jozef Migaš. At that time the participants agreed that the discussion should be held in the presence of the media and its outcomes regularly published on an internet page (www.konvent.sk). During the debate it was emphasized that expanding the application of the community method would respond to the interests of the Slovak Republic. Also support for incorporating the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the European Constitution was declared.

The second meeting of the National Convention held on 1 October 2001 was attended also by the Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda. The National Convention supported the elaboration of the

European Constitutional Treaty. In the conclusion the internet page of the National Convention which shows the basic documents and keeps track of the developing debate has been presented to the participants.

On the basis of the Laeken Declaration the opening session of the Convention on the Future of Europe was held on 28 February 2002 in Brussels. In this manner the debates that, until then, had been limited to a more or less national level, have been institutionalized on the European level.

On 3 March 2002 the third session of the National Convention took place attended by the President of the Slovak Republic Rudolf Schuster. The Slovak parliamentary representatives in the Convention on the Future of Europe in Brussels, Irena Belohorská and Pavol Hamžík together with the government representative Ján Figel', shared a brief concerning the first plenary session in Brussels. The subsequent discussion was dominated by the topic of presenting the interests of EU citizens in national and pan-European fora, bringing them closer to the Union via the streamlining of information flows, as well as a greater emphasis on education and science. Also, the need for improved coordination in the formation of a national position was stressed. In this regard, the creation of working groups dealing with specific topics was proposed.

The first working meeting - in the framework of the National Convention - out of the envisaged three, took place on 8 April 2002. The conclusions of these working meetings will be the basis for the supporting material of the 4th session of the National Convention to be held. The members of the National Convention, as well as experts delegated or invited from related sectors and institutions participated in the meeting. The topic of the meeting was the expectations of Slovak citizens from the Union and their possible reflection in the reform of EU mechanisms. At the centre of the discussion was the question of EU's mission and the procedures that should be used in order to complete it. These procedures should be undertaken so that the Union will remain democratic and transparent throughout the upcoming enlargement.

The second working meeting was held on 20 May 2002 and its topic was the vertical distribution of competence in the EU. The lack of transparency in the delimitation of powers between EU's institutions and the Member States has been defined as a crucial problem. To address this issue the proposal of a clearer division of competence into categories or catalogues has been discussed. This simple and clear system of categorization would define exclusive competence of the Union, shared competence and member states' competence. The level of intervention from the Union should be regulated by the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality.

The third working meeting on simplification of treaties and the constitutional issues should be held later this summer.

On 29 April 2002 an international seminar on the future of the European Union was organized. The main speakers were high level officials responsible for European integration from Austria, France, Germany and the United Kingdom who came to inform about their national debates and the position of their countries in the framework of the ongoing discussion on the future of Europe.

The fourth session of the National Convention is scheduled for 8 July 2002. This meeting would be highlighted by the presence of the Convention Presidium member Mr. Alojz Peterle. This session should be the milestone of the one-years long work of the National Convention and its outcome should provide a preliminary position on the main topics of the debate on the future of Europe.

More information about the ongoing debate in Slovakia can also be found in English on the web site www.konvent.sk.

The Slovak Republic attaches special significance to the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe because, just as the other candidate countries, it not only gives Slovakia a chance to express its opinion, but also a share in the responsibility for the future of Europe. This European-wide forum also increases the importance of the National Convention, which now also serves as a platform for confronting Slovak and European perspectives of the future of Europe.

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