

Ljubljana, 14 June 2002

**THE FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA**

Following the example of the Convention and Forum at the European level, a debate on the future of Europe has been taking place in Slovenia. The Slovenian Forum under the patronage of the Presidents of the Republic, the Parliament and the Government is chaired by three representatives of the Republic of Slovenia in the Convention on rotation basis

The topics for discussion at the sessions of the Forum are selected by an expert group which assists the Slovenian representatives in the Convention and includes a Secretariat for Assistance to the Forum composed of the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government Office for European Affairs, the Government Public Relations and Media Office (one representative from each institution) and the National Assembly (two representatives). The topics are determined with the consent of the Slovenian representatives in the Convention. The dynamics of the Forum sessions and the topics to be discussed by the Forum follow the development of the debate in the Convention. The Secretariat assists the members of the institutionalised Forum at the state level while structured debates at lower levels are organised by the institutions which have their representatives in the Forum.

In terms of organisation, the Forum works closely with several institutions in Slovenia, such as the Delegation of the European Commission and its communication centre - Center Evropa, the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations etc.

COMPOSITION OF THE FORUM

Representatives of chambers, trade unions, universities, student organisations, secondary school youth, non-governmental organisations, local interest groups, minorities and ethnic groups, the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and religious communities are invited to participate in the Forum on the Future of Europe. They co-operate with the national representatives of the Government and Parliament.

The national Forum is composed of the representatives of the following institutions:

- Government (4 representatives, including the member of the Convention and an alternate member)
- National Assembly (8 representatives, including two members of the Convention and their alternates)
- National Council (2)
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (1)
- Chamber of Craft (1)
- Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry (1)
- trade unions (3)

- *academia* (5: 3 representatives of the University of Ljubljana and 2 representatives of the University of Maribor)
- *student organisations* (2)
- *secondary school youth* (2)
- *non-governmental organisations* (9)
- *local interest groups* (4)
- *minorities* (3)
- *religious communities* (2)
- *Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts* (2)
- *Slovenian World Congress* (1)
- *Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries* (4)
- *invited experts* (3).

Thus, the national Forum on the Future of Europe has 57 members

Since its establishment, the national Forum on the Future of Europe held two sessions at the state level. At the first, inaugural session, participants were addressed by the President of the Republic Milan Kučan, the Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek and the President of the National Assembly Borut Pahor. The session was attended by the diplomatic corps in Slovenia. The title of the inaugural session was »What do citizens expect from the European union?«. The second session dealt with the distribution of competences between the EU and the Member States. Dr Janez Potočnik, minister for European affairs and member of the Forum, presented his views on the subject. The debates in the Forum are regularly followed and extensively covered by the media.

The third session of the Forum will be held on 9 July 2002 and will, given the interest expressed by several members, focus on the discussion about national identities.

Structured debate within the Forum

In order to discuss individual, concrete issues within the Forum, structured debates take place at the following levels:

- regional
- academic
- non-governmental
- corporate
- trade unions etc.
- in connection with European Forums
- and Forums in individual Member States and candidate countries.

Structured debate take place at one or several levels at the same time, having a form of public opinion presentations, conferences, round table discussions, media events, radio and television broadcasts, as well as in the framework of already functioning instruments of the strategy to bring the Union closer to Slovene citizens, such as Eurobus, Europhone, Euroquiz, Eurochat, etc.

Debates and events are of course open to all interested citizens regardless of the level. As far as the contents are concerned, the debate requires guidance, taking into account specific population structures according to their interests and needs.

Within the Forum, three structured debates took place so far which were all well attended. The first debate was organised at the Faculty of Law in Ljubljana; the main item of the debate was the lecture given by Mr Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament.

The second structured debate was a discussion among students entitled »The European Commission as the guardian of small states«, held at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. The debate was organised on the occasion of the visit of students from the Cambridge University.

The third structured debate was a public presentation of the opinions of Slovenian NGOs and was held on the premises of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia. It was organised by Slovenian NGOs together with the EC Delegation to Slovenia, the Government and the National Assembly.

In the discussions within the national Forum and in structured debates, the most frequent topic was the role of small states and of the civil society in the EU, and the need for more democratisation in EU decision-making was emphasised. More structured debates are expected in the following months at the regional level, as well as at the level of the social partners (economy, trade unions etc.).

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