

NOTE

Subject : **Note on the plenary meeting**
 – **Brussels, 21 and 22 March 2002**

Opening of the plenary meeting

The Convention Chairman, Mr Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, opened the meeting, assisted by the two Vice-Chairmen, Mr Jean-Luc Dehaene and Mr Giuliano Amato.

I. General debate: "What do you expect of the European Union?"

Introduction. Mr Giscard d'Estaing opened the first substantive debate of the Convention by emphasising the size of the task at hand. He said that the citizens of Europe felt that their voice was not being heard on the future of Europe and that the first phase of the Convention should therefore be a listening phase.

He invited the members of the Convention to begin the debate. They were to speak freely and at a personal level, addressing first and foremost the other members of the Convention. The Chairman wanted the members of the Convention to identify what, in their view, should be Europe's priorities for the next twenty-five to fifty years.

Over eighty members of the Convention took part in the debate. The nature and the content of the contributions varied widely. Some members concentrated on a couple of priorities or even on just one. Others embraced the whole gamut of European affairs. Many contributions began with an analysis of the current situation within the Union. Notwithstanding the wealth and diversity of contributions, the following general themes recurred:

Assessment of the current situation. Very many members of the Convention commended the considerable progress made in the last fifty years, which had surpassed even the most optimistic forecasts conceivable at the outset. The results were taken for granted, especially the most important one, namely peace in Europe.

Among the successes of European integration, particular mention was made of the single market, the four freedoms (free movement of persons, goods, services and capital), the introduction of the euro for twelve Member States and the removal of controls on persons at borders within the Schengen area. Today, if Community nationals decided to leave one Member State to go and live in another, they did so by choice and because they had been afforded that opportunity, not because the move had been imposed upon them by fear or by force.

Many members of the Convention welcomed the enlargement process under way. Upon its completion, the scission of Europe in two, which had resulted from the Second World War, would disappear forever.

Nevertheless, many speakers also pointed to the weaknesses and shortcomings of present-day Europe. Europe did not listen to its citizens enough. Citizens did not feel they could hold to account those in positions of power who took decisions on Europe's behalf. The fact that the European Parliament was elected by universal suffrage, that the ministers sitting around the Council table represented their governments and that the European Commissioners were appointed by the Member States' governments and accountable to the European Parliament did not dispel the view that Europe was not democratic enough. Europe's citizens had to be directly able to choose and remove those at the helm of its affairs.

Public opinion often regarded the institutional mechanisms of the Union as laborious, complex and difficult to understand. Inside the Union, Europe was perceived as abstract and distant. Outside, it was perceived as not effective enough, failing, for instance, to respond rapidly and adequately to the challenges posed by globalisation and cross-border developments.

A number of speakers thought that Europe tended to be too prominent at the expense of the independence and freedom of nation states.

Expectations of Europe. A large number of Convention members thought that their fellow citizens expected greater involvement by Europe. Europe would have to be able to meet that expectation. Greater European presence was mentioned in the following areas in particular:

- an area of security and justice aimed, in particular, at enabling Europe to react to terrorist threats or migration pressure at its borders;
- European action on the international stage, enabling the Union to assume its full responsibilities and champion its values.

Others pointed to the need to build a credible and efficient economic and social nucleus and to step up coordination of fiscal and budgetary policies, especially between the twelve states sharing the same currency – the euro.

Defence policy, internal cohesion, food safety, the environment and solidarity with developing countries were also mentioned as areas in which Europe should play a greater role.

A number of members expressed a wish that the Union respect and protect the Member States' cultural identities. They wanted less European intervention and a willingness to scale down European action in certain fields. Reducing Europe's powers and limiting the *acquis communautaire* to areas where it could bring real added value would lend Europe greater legitimacy.

Principles which Europe must respect. All the members of the Convention stressed the shared values which unite our continent, citing *inter alia* democracy, the rule of law and the protection and promotion of human rights. Some mentioned the Charter of Fundamental Rights and asked that it be incorporated into the treaties. Others called on the Union to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The theme of equality between Member States was mentioned several times, especially by the Convention members from the candidate countries. Each state, whatever its population, should feel at ease and respected in an enlarged Europe. Solidarity between Member States and the mechanisms underpinning it were also raised by a number of speakers.

The majority of Convention members called for a simpler division of powers and responsibilities, under which it would be clear to all what was the domain of the Union and what was covered at national, regional or even local level. The division of responsibilities should be one of the main topics to be addressed by the Convention. Europe's citizens were expecting clarity in this area above all.

A very large number of Convention members signalled their attachment to the principle of subsidiarity. They wanted effective arrangements put in place to ensure compliance with that principle.

A significant proportion of Convention members touched on the subject of democratic legitimacy and wanted the European Union to take account of citizens' expectations and give citizens a greater say in and fuller scrutiny of European decision-making. Transparency and accountability should improve the way Europe worked.

Institutional aspects. Some Convention members wanted the Union to have a treaty with constitutional status in some shape or form. A hierarchy of rules ought to be introduced. Several members reiterated their attachment to the Community method. Others emphasised the intergovernmental method. Tried and tested, it had shown that it worked. Extension of the qualified-majority rule and of the codecision procedure with the European Parliament was raised as well. Several members also referred to the role of the Presidency and the rotating Presidency system.

Convention. Several speakers addressed the work of the Convention itself. The vast majority stressed their determination to succeed in the task they had been given and warned their colleagues of the consequences if the Convention were to fail.

Some advocated that the Convention aim for a consensual text which could guarantee the success of the next intergovernmental conference (IGC).

Many Convention members stressed the importance of consulting civil society and, in particular, young people. Their proposals would have to be heard. A few members also wanted the churches to be given a hearing. One member proposed that a questionnaire be sent to every citizen, based on the model used in Switzerland for constitutional reforms.

II. Requests by representatives of the candidate countries

The Convention discussed the proposal presented by the Praesidium in response to the requests by the candidate countries at the inaugural meeting (CONV 10/2).

A few speakers wanted it amended so that two representatives (and not just one) from the candidate countries were invited to attend the Praesidium's proceedings as observers. Some representatives from the candidate countries also pressed for the right to be able to speak in their own language during the Convention's discussions.

The Chairman and some members of the Praesidium pointed out that not all Member States were represented within the Praesidium, nor should the candidate countries be as such. The possibility for Convention members from candidate countries to speak in their own language, at their request, would be re-examined at the technical level in consultation with the European Parliament.

The Chairman found that there was broad agreement on the proposals submitted to the Convention.

III. Working methods

The Convention held an exchange of views on the Praesidium's proposal on working methods (CONV 9/2).

The majority of speakers called for a flexible and pragmatic approach so that the Convention could quickly get down to the substance, given its limited time frame. Some speakers requested amendments. Others gave their agreement, while making a number of points.

The Chairman answered the questions raised, explained the reasons for the amendments made to the initial text and assured the members that the working methods would be applied flexibly, in a pragmatic manner and with an open mind. He also pointed out that a review procedure (Article 16) had been included in order to adapt working methods in future, should this prove necessary.

Winding up the discussions, the Chairman found a consensus within the Convention on the adoption of the working methods as they stood.

IV. Forum

Further to the note on the Forum (CONV 8/02), the recommendations of which were agreed to, Mr Dehaene mentioned the following points:

- the organisation of an online Internet chat with civil society would be considered;
- the open letter on the Convention and the Forum would be sent to the editors of the major European newspapers in the coming days;
- it was important to organise forums with civil society in the states represented within the Convention;
- the Economic and Social Committee would hold regular meetings with representatives of civil society after the meetings of the Convention; Mr Dehaene proposed that a member of the Praesidium and a member of the Secretariat be present at those meetings;
- a "Eurobarometer" of public opinion on the issues addressed by the Laeken Declaration, as proposed by a member of the Convention, would be worth carrying out.

The representative of the Committee of the Regions provided some information on the dialogue initiated with the regions on the issues being debated within the Convention.

V. Youth Convention

The Chairman recalled the proposal to hold a "Youth Convention", modelled on the Convention itself. He provided some explanations on the organisational aspects. The Youth Convention would be held in Brussels in July, either immediately before or immediately after the meeting of the Convention, scheduled for 11 and 12 July 2002. The Youth Convention would be organised along the same lines as the Convention. The young people should be briefed on the work initiated by their seniors. The members of the Convention would be responsible for choosing the young people, 168 being designated by Convention members from the Member States and the candidate countries, 32 by the European Parliament and 10 by the Commission. They would be aged between 18 and 25.

The Chairman stressed the importance of balanced representation as regards age, level of education, gender, etc. The Youth Convention would largely be funded by the Commission, with the support of the Secretariat and the European Parliament.

A note on the organisation of the Youth Convention would soon be sent to members of the Convention.

VI. Forthcoming meetings

The Chairman said that after this meeting, intended as a general discussion, the Convention should move on to more specific issues. The Praesidium proposed that the next two meetings focus on:

- Europe's tasks (what powers should be exercised at European level?);
- performance of those tasks (from the viewpoint of both democratic legitimacy and effectiveness).

In order to improve preparations for the first debate, members of the Convention would receive a document describing the current division of powers within the Union.

The hearing of civil society would take place after the meetings in April and May 2002 so that its representatives could state their views on those two main topics, having been briefed on the first Convention's initial discussions.

List of speakers in order of speaking
Plenary meeting, 21 and 22 March 2002

General debate: "What do you expect of the European Union?"

1. Ms Sylvia-Yvonne KAUFMANN
2. Mr Alojz PETERLE
3. Mr Alain BARRAU
4. Ms Cristiana MUSCARDINI
5. Mr Jürgen MEYER
6. Mr Josep BORRELL FONTELLES
7. Mr Andrew DUFF
8. Mr Pierre CHEVALIER
9. Mr Erwin TEUFEL
10. Mr Paraskevas AVGERINOS
11. Mr Proinsias DE ROSSA
12. Mr Jens-Peter BONDE
13. Mr Michael ATTALIDES
14. Mr Josef ZIELENIEC
15. Mr António VITORINO
16. Mr Ray McSHARRY
17. Mr Gianfranco FINI
18. Mr Mesut YILMAZ
19. Mr Elio DI RUPO
20. Mr Alain LAMASSOURE
21. Mr Peter HAIN
22. Mr Jozef OLEKSY
23. Mr Slavko GABER
24. Mr Hans van MIERLO
25. Mr Eduardo ZAPLANA
26. Mr Pavol HAMZIK
27. Ms Ana PALACIO
28. Mr Sören LEKBERG
29. Mr Matjaz NAHTIGAL
30. Mr Peter GLOTZ
31. Mr Klaus HÄNSCH
32. Mr Michael FRENDÓ
33. Mr Iñigo MENDEZ DE VIGO
34. Ms Lena HJELM-WALLEN
35. Mr Georges KATIFORIS
36. Mr Reinhard Eugen BÖSCH
37. Mr Lamberto DINI
38. Mr Edvins INKENS
39. Mr Antonio TAJANI

* Alternate member: Mr Louis MICHEL

40. Ms Meglena KUNEVA
41. Mr David HEATHCOAT-AMORY
42. Ms Maria Eduarda AZEVEDO
43. Mr Marco FOLLINI
44. Mr Rihards PIKS
45. Mr Hubert HAENEL
46. Mr Goran LENNMARKER
47. Ms Danuta HUBNER
48. Mr Jozsef SZÁJER
49. Mr Matti VANHANEN
50. Mr João de VALLERA
51. Mr Timothy KIRKHOPE
52. Mr Rolandas PAVILIONIS * Alternate member: Mr Vytenis ANDRIUKAITIS
53. Ms Linda McAVAN
54. Mr Pál VASTAGH
55. Mr Hannes FARNLEITNER
56. Mr Peter SERRACINO-INGLOTT
57. Mr Alberto COSTA
58. Mr Ben FAYOT
59. Ms Ritta KORHONEN * Alternate member: Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN
60. Mr Jan FIGEL
61. Mr Carlos CARNERO GONZALEZ * Alternate member: Ms Anne VAN LANCKER
62. Ms Ayfer YILMAZ
63. Mr Jacques SANTER
64. Ms Teija TIILIKAINEN
65. Mr Johannes VOGGENHUBER
66. Mr René van der LINDEN
67. Ms Marietta YANNAKOU-KOUTSIKOU
68. Mr Henning CHRISTOPHERSEN
69. Mr Peter KREITZBERG
70. Mr Michel BARNIER
71. Mr Ali TEKIN
72. Mr Alvydas MEDALINSKAS
73. Mr John BRUTON
74. Ms Gisela STUART
75. Mr Karel DE GUCHT
76. Ms Piia-Noora KAUPPI * Alternate member: Ms Hanja MAIJ-WEGGEN
77. Ms Pervenche BERÈS * Alternate member: Mr Olivier DUHAMEL
78. Mr Henrik DAM KRISTENSEN
79. Ms Evelin LICHTENBERGER * Alternate member: Mr Caspar EINEM
80. Mr Nickolay MLADENOV
81. Mr Paul HELMINGER
82. Mr Gabriel CISNEROS
83. Mr Livin MAIOR

Requests by representatives of the candidate countries

- 84. Mr Aloiz PETERLE
- 85. Mr Matjaz NAHTIGAL
- 86. Mr Gundars KRATS * Alternate member: Mr Roberts ZILE
- 87. Mr Janos MARTONYI
- 88. Mr Jens-Peter BONDE
- 89. Ms Ana PALACIO

Working methods

- 90. Mr Elmar BROK
- 91. Mr Ben FAYOT
- 92. Mr Alvydas MEDALINSKAS
- 93. Mr Hannes FARNLEITNER
- 94. Mr Peter ALTMAIER * Alternate member: Mr Erwin TEUFEL
- 95. Mr Andrew DUFF
- 96. Mr Panayiotis DEMETRIOU
- 97. Mr Jens-Peter BONDE
- 98. The Earl of STOCKTON * Alternate member: Mr Timothy KIRKHOPE
- 99. Ms Ana PALACIO
- 100. Mr Klaus HÄNSCH

Forum

- 101. Mr Eduardo ZAPLANA
