

CONV 48/02

NOTE

from	the Secretariat
to	the Convention
Subject :	The Convention and Civil Society

At its meeting on 21-22 March, the Convention agreed on the importance of ensuring that the public has the opportunity both to follow and provide input into its work. It endorsed a number of proposals on how to do this (see the note circulated by Mr Dehaene to the Convention - Doc CONV 8/02). Many of these proposals have been put into effect; the websites (both Convention and Forum) are up and running, the letter to editors of major European newspapers has been sent, and a number of initial contacts have been established with NGOs. It has also been announced that one of the June sessions of the Convention will be devoted to civil society.

Arrangements for this session now need to be set in train. The Praesidium discussed this issue at its meeting on 8 May, and agreed that the following proposals should be submitted to the Convention for approval.

I. Date

In order to allow sufficient time for preparation, **the session devoted to civil society should be the second June session (24 and 25 June).**

II. Organisation

In order to allow the Convention to have as full access as possible to the views and concerns of civil society, the following arrangements should be made:

- **The full two days of 24 and 25 June should be designated as 'open days' for civil society, with space set aside in the buildings of the European Parliament to enable NGOs and other organisations to set up stands to enable them to present their views;**

- **The plenary session itself should take place exceptionally in the hemicycle in order to allow NGOs to follow the discussions from within the chamber;**
- **Smaller meeting rooms in the EP should be set aside to enable representatives of civil society to organise debates and meetings with members of the Convention.**

III. Structure of the plenary session

The discussions in the plenary session itself should be structured around the following four elements:

- i) Introduction by Vice-President Dehaene reporting on the Forum, and his contacts with civil society

To complement the report on the Forum, **the Convention Secretariat should prepare a digest of contributions from Forum members for distribution to members of the Convention.**

- ii) Reports by the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the Social Partners

In recognition of their role as a bridge between the Convention and civil society, **representatives of the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the Social Partners should be invited to report to the plenary session on their contacts.**

- iii) Reports from representatives of civil society

In order to allow for representatives from civil society to report directly to the Convention, **European NGOs should be invited to identify, for each major sector of interest, a speaker to convey their collective views.** To facilitate this, several members of the Praesidium have agreed to take early contact with those NGOs operating in each of these sectors.

- iv) Reports on the national debates

Since the reports from civil society will be from Europe-wide NGOs, **One member of the Convention from each country represented is invited to report, either orally at the June session, or in writing, on the progress (and feedback so far) of their national debates.**

IV. Follow-up

Apart from issues which emerge from the June session itself, arrangements should be made to set in train the following:

- **Working groups should be encouraged to organise hearings with NGOs with relevant expertise.**

- **A live 'internet chat' with the President and/or Vice-Presidents should be organised in the early autumn.**
- **The Praesidium should, as far as possible, continue to field one of its members to attend the regular briefing meetings organised by the Economic and Social Committee.**

The Convention is invited to endorse these proposals.
