

COVER NOTE

from : Secretariat

to : Convention

Subject : Digest of contributions to the Forum

In order to prepare for the plenary session devoted to civil society which will take place on 24-25 June 2002, members of the Convention will find attached a digest of the contributions which have been submitted to the Forum since the inaugural session of the Convention, up to and including 7 June 2002.

DIGEST OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FORUM**Introduction**

1. The Laeken declaration setting up the Convention on the future of the European Union also set up a Forum to allow organisations representing civil society to provide input into the wider debate. The Forum takes the form of a structured network, through a dedicated website, where organisations may register and post their contributions. It has been operational since the inaugural session of the Convention at the end of February.
2. So far 160 organisations have registered and contributed to the debate. Registration has been at the average rate of about eight per week, rising rapidly over the last few weeks as organisations were encouraged to apply in time for their contribution to be taken into account for the second June plenary session.
3. The 160 organisations represent a wide cross section of civil society. The majority of them have interests which are Europe-wide, although there are also many national organisations which have chosen to register. There is a rather uneven spread of national organisations, with several Member States not being represented at all, and only a limited number originating in the candidate countries.

4. The Forum is divided into four categories, and organisations are invited to select the most appropriate category when registering. The breakdown of the 160 organisations by category is as follows:

political or public authority (including at sub-national level)	17
socio-economic interests (social partners, professional groups etc)	16
academic interests and think tanks	28
other civil society organisations, NGOs etc	<u>99</u>
TOTAL	<u>160</u>

5. Each organisation is invited to submit a contribution, together with a one page summary. Both of these are posted on the website. Given the number and range of the contributions, this digest of them makes no claim to be comprehensive. Its aim is rather to distil some of the key issues and concerns which are reflected in the input to the forum as a whole. This should provide Members of the Convention with an overview of the Forum, and thereby help civil society contribute to the work of the Convention. Those wishing to have a complete view of the Forum will need to turn to the contributions themselves on the website.
6. The range of contributions does not lend itself to drawing substantive conclusions from the Forum. But certain broad themes run through many contributions. The first is the wish to see the Union operating more closely to those it seeks to serve. That means both taking decisions at the appropriate level and ensuring that Europe's citizens have a greater stake in those decisions, at whatever level they are taken. Secondly, and linked to the first, is the concern to improve the level of involvement of civil society, through its constituent organisations, in the European decision-making process, and to recognise in the Treaty its particular role. Thirdly, there is a strong emphasis on the Union both respecting fundamental

rights as they are currently defined, and where appropriate, extending them. Many organisations believe this can only be fully achieved by incorporating the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the Treaty. Fourthly, each sectoral interest group puts particular emphasis on effective and legitimate decision-making, often calling for a move to decision-taking by QMV coupled with co-decision in the relevant policy area.

7. Beyond these broad themes, there are many other issues raised. These will be considered below according to the four categories, which although designed to make the Forum easier to manage, are to some extent arbitrary, with a number of organisations not fitting obviously into any one particular category (hence the large number which have opted for the fourth or 'other' category).

Political or public authorities

8. The majority of organisations which have registered under this heading represent regional or sub-regional organisations. As such, much of the content of their contributions relates to the issue of the role and status of sub-national bodies within the European Union. A number take as their starting point the need to include in the Treaty a recognition of the right of citizens to local democracy, possibly by integrating into the Treaty the Charter of the Council of Europe on local autonomy. Many also look for concrete implementation of the local democracy provisions in Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union, which call for decisions to be taken as closely as possible to the citizen, as well as simplification in particular of those legislative provisions which require implementation at the sub-national level (implying a very close involvement of regional and local authorities at all stages of the legislative process).
9. Some call for a clear recognition of the four levels of government: European, national, regional and local. Others seek explicit recognition in the Treaty of the role of regions and local authorities, and several consider that, in the absence of a detailed list of competences, an effective system of subsidiarity control (both ex-ante and ex-post) needs to be established.

10. Several contributions refer to the need to take greater account of the financial consequences on sub-national bodies of decisions taken at a European level. There are a number of calls to give regions with legislative power the right of access to the European Court of Justice, special recognition in the Treaty, and the right to participate in meetings of COSAC.

Socio-economic interests

11. A relatively small number of organisations registered in this category. They mostly represent the interests of employees or particular sectors of the economy such as cooperatives and public services.
12. A number of these organisations argue for a greater balance between economic policy and social objectives. There is a call for some core elements of the European social model, for example the goal of full employment, to be explicitly included in the Treaty. Some organisations call for greater recognition for the cooperative sector, as well as the area of services of general interest. There is a demand for institutionalised dialogue with social partners, including enlarging the number of interlocutors to make them more representative. The issue of greater employee participation is also raised. Several organisations call for integrating the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the Treaty in order to provide for greater recognition of basic social rights.

Academic interests and Think-tanks

13. The contributions to the Forum from academic institutions and think tanks are inevitably of a rather different nature than many of the non-governmental organisations. Many of their proposals are not necessarily designed to serve a particular interest, but rather to help take

forward the broader debate on the future structure of the European Union. Several have outlined possible models for a future constitution, including proposals on how to merge the Communities and the Union and to adapt the pillar structure. A number have addressed specific issues which the Convention has already examined (e.g. the delimitation of competences).

14. Several student groups have submitted a draft constitution or 'manifesto' for Europe. A number of think tanks have submitted ideas on future institutional arrangements, including some detailed proposals on the issue of the election of the President of the Commission and the future role of the High Representative for CFSP. The idea of a common language has been floated, as has the possibility of creating regional unions to act as groups within the EU as a whole. There is also a call for greater transparency in lobbying practices.

Other Civil society organisations.

15. By far the largest number of organisations registered under this category. As a result a wide variety of issues is covered. Several distinct areas of interest can however be identified.
16. A number of organisations from the 'social' sector registered in this category. Many of their concerns overlap with those raised under the social-economic category (see above). However also included are organisations particularly concerned with issues of gender equality and support for families. There is a call for a more active policy of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all major policy areas. A number of organisations call for a greater emphasis on human development policies, including support for families and the fight against poverty. Some refer to the increasing use of an 'open coordination' approach in the social sector, and ask that this be formally recognised in the Treaty. Several contributions call for the Union to recognise explicitly the objective of greater social cohesion. There is a call for a more coherent and sustainable common agricultural policy.

17. There are a number of organisations with an interest in the field of development. Many of them underline the importance of placing development policy and poverty eradication at the heart of external policy, and wish to maintain a distinct development organisational framework within both Commission and Council. A number call for the Treaties to be amended to reflect the central role of development policy, and to give a legal base for consultation with civil society. There is a call for the European Development Fund to be integrated into the Community budget, and for development policy to become a shared Community/Member State competence.
18. In the environment sector, a number of organisations call for better recognition of the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development. In particular there were calls to take better account of sustainability in CAP reform, extend QMV with co-decision for environmental decisions (in particular Article 175 (2) of the EC Treaty), and include environmental rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
19. This category also includes a number of contributions from organisations working in the field of human rights. In general, these organisations seek to maintain and strengthen concern for human rights as a key element in all policies. Most call for the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the Treaty, and many consider that this should be accompanied by some strengthening of the Charter. Some also ask for the Union to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights. A number call for better provisions for ensuring gender equality, the rights of the child, and the protection of the family and of handicapped persons.
20. Several organisations in the cultural field submitted contributions under this category. They call for a much stronger cultural element in the European Union of the future, with a stronger commitment to the existing provisions in Article 151 TEC, and a move to decision-making by QMV and co-decision. Several call for the formal recognition in the Treaty of the plurality of education, and of access to education under equal conditions. There is also a call for a specific legal basis for support for sport.

21. There are calls from a number of religious organisations for a future constitutional treaty to contain a spiritual element, with an explicit recognition of the religious and spiritual heritage of Europe. Several also want to see Declaration number 11, on the respect for the status of churches, incorporated into the Treaty.
22. A number of citizens organisations have sent contributions under this category. They call in general for greater transparency in the functioning of the Union, as well as greater participation of individual citizens, making use as far as possible of new technology. A number call for a single referendum, or a guarantee of national referenda, on the Treaty which they consider should be the outcome of the Convention. There are also contributions from several political parties as well as 'European' organisations (both 'pro-European/federalist' and 'eurosceptic'). A number of them call for a federal constitution for Europe, and some contain detailed proposals on possible future institutional structures. On the other hand, there are several organisations which express concern in particular at the continuing lack of democratic accountability within the Union, and call for a greater involvement of national parliaments.

Follow-up

23. This digest covers all contributions sent to the Forum by the first June plenary session (7 June 2002). Organisations are continuing to register, and are encouraged to do so. The site can of course be accessed by everyone, including members of the Convention, and the Convention secretariat will also continue to monitor contributions closely.
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