

COVER NOTE

from : Secretariat

to : Convention

Subject: **Report on National Debate on the future of Europe:
– Estonia**

Members of the Convention will find attached the report on the national debate on the future of Europe taking place in Estonia.

CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE
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BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ESTONIAN NATIONAL DEBATE

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RIIGIKOGU

The debate on the future of the EU in Estonia can be characterised according to two dimensions.

First, there is the political, so- called elite dimension; second, there is the general public dimension of the debate. If the political elite is discussing the more concrete aspects of accession and the issues related to the future of Europe in a broader perspective, taking the Laeken issues as a basis for discussion, then the general public is still in the phase of discussing threats and promises related to the accession. The general public is discussing *inter alia* the issues of sovereignty, national currency and the Euro, preserving of national identity, at the same time there are questions regarding the changes in food prices or social security after the accession.

The debate generally tends to focus much more on the terms of accession, not the future of the Union *per se*. The questions of Estonia's accession and the results of this historic action stimulate more lively discussions than the four subjects put forward in the in Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union. The general public does not discuss the item of subsidiarity or the role of the national parliaments, but tends to focus on the questions "shall we still be an independent state after accession" or " shall we start getting instructions from Brussels for our daily lives".

On the political arena, both the parliament and the government have facilitated and taken part in the future debate. The government (the MFA) has opened a special website, containing an overview and statements by foreign and domestic speakers (<http://spunk.vm.ee/euro//tulevikudebatt/>) .

The Riigikogu, especially its European Affairs Committee, has contributed to the debate by creating an interfactional round- table on the future of the EU and by devoting its annual international conference "Estonia and the EU" to the issues of Laeken declaration (<http://www.riigikogu.ee/chancellery.html>) .

The general understanding about the future of the Union is that there is no need for a super- state, which is centralised and too complicated for the citizens. Estonia's representatives have stressed the necessity of transparent and legitimate actions on all levels of EU decision- making process. The values of unity in diversity and strong national and European identity have been stressed as well.

The participating NGOs and the general public have also focused mostly on the terms and problems of the accession. The European Movement has organised a conference and several NGOs have discussed the subject among their members. The conference organised by the European Movement can be considered the first NGO initiated and widely participated event dealing with the issues of the future of the EU, following the guidelines set for the Convention. The European Movement has organised several debates with the participation of prominent foreign and Estonian politicians, diplomats, writers and journalists. During summer 2002 9 regional debates are planned. The Movement uses a specially designed questionnaire as the basis for discussions ([http://www.euroopaliikumine.ee/publications/Kodanike%20foorum%20EL%20tuleviku%20k%C4%si%20muses%20\(ingl%20k\).doc](http://www.euroopaliikumine.ee/publications/Kodanike%20foorum%20EL%20tuleviku%20k%C4%si%20muses%20(ingl%20k).doc))

As the co-operation between the state and the civic society has been recently institutionalised, we have the opportunity to integrate our internal needs and wishes with those of the European arena.

The general public has been provided with a possibility of direct questions- answers sessions via special EU- info-telephone. One such session is devoted to the issues of the future of Europe and will be held during the month of June. Such free phone possibility has been actively used: during last year 1554 questions were asked. Most of these (22%) concerned the relations between Estonia and the Union, 16% were on EU information sources and 12% were relating to general issues of EU and its institutions. Students, retired people and entrepreneurs were the most active part of the population.

As an example of NGOs initiative , the project of Estonian Civil Training Centre has to be mentioned. It involves schoolchildren and women and has organised meetings, seminars and follow- up presentations on the subjects related to Estonia's accession and the future of Estonia as a Member state of the EU.

To facilitate and develop a meaningful and successful national debate, the precondition in our opinion is bring together the interested people, representatives of interest groups and parties as well as to stimulate an attentive and interested participation of the state institutions.
