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COVER NOTE

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

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

THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE IN BULGARIA – PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY (summary of the first stage)

This summary places an emphasis on the participants in the debate, on the issues discussed and on some major recommendations for the future. An overview of the specific activities – past and present – is given in the Annex.

A. Participants

At the pre-Convention stage, the Bulgarian national debate on the “Future of Europe” has included only a handful of established institutions in the field of European integration (e.g. the Institute for European Studies and Information / IESI, and the European Institute). They have promoted the debate in Bulgaria jointly with their participation in international networks focused specifically on the post-Nice debate.

In parallel with the launch of the Convention and the prospect of Bulgaria’s participation in it, a wider circle of participants from civil society and academia has joined the debate:

- NGOs with a European vocation and think tanks focusing their expertise on political science issues;
- Representatives of Bulgarian academia (both teaching staff and students) from several universities (not only in Sofia but also throughout the country), mainly from their social sciences faculties;
- Young people – Europe-oriented associations and clubs – also outside educational establishments.

Conclusions:

1. The number of participants in the debate has grown rapidly following the institutionalisation of Bulgaria’s membership in the European Convention, since this has been interpreted as a signal of recognition of the country’s future EU membership.
2. The growth of participants has followed two encouraging trends: (a) towards the inclusion of an enlightened public capable of delivering informed positions of civil society in Bulgaria on the issues discussed; (b) towards actively involving young people, which has characterised the debate as future-oriented.

B. Issues

As in other candidate countries, the debate on the “Future of Europe” has been inexorably linked to the debate on accession – negotiations, implementation of EU legislation and the deriving domestic reform, etc. The latter has been used as a reference point for discussing Convention-related issues. At times it has proven difficult to speak of the medium term perspective (the design of an EU, of which Bulgaria will be a member) in the face of the serious tasks to be carried out in the short term (successfully concluding negotiations and arriving at full membership).

On the other hand, the novelty of the institutional format, chosen for the “Future of Europe” debate, has attracted the attention of civil society and media. There are two reasons for a generally positive perception of the first phase of the Convention’s work in the domestic debate:

- The arrangements adopted at the start to treat candidate countries’ representatives as full-fledged members (languages, representation in the Presidium). This carries a positive message

and has the potential of countering sceptical stereotypes of the type “they don’t want us in”.

- The decision to start the debate with the questions “What do we expect from the EU?” and “What missions for the enlarged EU?” has responded to the desire of civil society to discuss policy issues – the political project of a united Europe – rather than to focus primarily on institutional issues.

Discussions on the post-Nice agenda items have shown both

- the difficulty to debate effectively an institutional system that is complex both vertically (levels of government) and horizontally (inter-institutional balance) and, therefore, is difficult to comprehend, and
- the potential to approach such complicated topics requiring high level of expertise from the perspective of democracy and legitimacy, although the lack of prosperity undermines the success even of a discussion on democratic principles and values.

Therefore, at the very start the debate has included also elements of disseminating information about the topics and the institutions involved.

Conclusions:

1. The debate on the “Future of Europe” cannot be separated from that of accession.
2. The debate on the Convention’s agenda proper will be perceived positively if it covers broad policy issues and is not limited to institutional (“architectural”) constructions.
3. The debate on the “Future of Europe” should have the mission of introducing the vision of the EU as a “Union of shared principles and values” into the debate on accession.

C. Recommendations

How to develop the debate on the “Future of Europe” and the involvement of civil society in it?

1. **The Convention must go to the citizens.** The openness of the Convention to views expressed by civil society has generated positive attitudes. However, this has to be complemented with increasing participation of the members of the Convention * in the debate launched by civil society in their own country, and ** in the debate in other countries represented in this forum – the “exchange” of members of the Convention from EU member states and candidate countries will be particularly useful.
2. **The views on a shared future must be shared with each other.** Special encouragement should be given to increase the exchange of opinions between the most active participants from civil society in the “Future of Europe” debate (especially between those from EU member states and from candidate countries). This could help also the efforts made by both sides to communicate EU enlargement / accession to the EU to domestic audiences.

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ACTIVITIES
OF THE BULGARIAN THIRD SECTOR AND ACADEMIA
RELATED TO THE “FUTURE OF EUROPE” DEBATE
(in 2000, 2001 & 2002)

The launching of a public debate on the “Future of Europe” in Bulgaria has taken the democratic form of a **network**, rather than a centralised and institutionalised structure. A number of organisations in the third sector and academia undertake complementary activities in parallel aiming at different segments of society and with a different territorial focus in the countryside. Here are some examples of the activities undertaken by the key promoters of debate domestically and with pan-European linkages:

II. In 2000

1. November 2000 - October 2001 --- The INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES AND INFORMATION (IESI) was among the initiators and most active participants in the international “**Villa Faber Group on the Future of the EU**”, which produced the paper: “**Thinking Enlarged: The Accession Countries and the Future of the EU**”, submitted to the European Commission and the European Parliament on the eve of the Laeken European Council.

III. In 2001

2. March 2001 --- The EUROPEAN INSTITUTE organised a **public lecture of Ms. Nadejda Mihaylova**, then Bulgarian Foreign Minister, regarding the Bulgarian views on the “Future of Europe”.

3. Since December 2001 --- The INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES AND INFORMATION (IESI) launched a **series of public discussions entitled “We in the European Debate”** aimed at bridging the political class with NGOs and academia on the theme of future EU reforms, as follows:

- On 3 December 2001 - public discussion organised with the European Integration Committee of the National Assembly and the BULGARIAN EUROPEAN COMMUNITY STUDIES ASSOCIATION (BECSA) - on the eve of the Laeken summit;
- On 26 February 2002 - public discussion organised with the ASSOCIATION “JOURNALISTS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION” and the Information Centre of the European Union in Sofia - on the eve of the inauguration of the European Convention.

4. December 2001 – February 2002 --- The EUROPEAN INSTITUTE organised three NGO workshops to develop a **draft position of a number of Bulgarian NGOs** on the agenda of the “Future of Europe” debate. It was sent to all Bulgarian state institutions and to the embassies of EU member states in Sofia. A special debate on this draft position was organised at the European Integration Committee of the National Assembly.

IV. In 2002

5. On 19 January 2002 --- The BULGARIAN EUROPEAN COMMUNITY STUDIES ASSOCIATION (BECSA) organised a **discussion of all Jean Monnet lecturers in Bulgaria** on the forthcoming constitutional reforms in the European Union and the future work of the European

Convention.

6. In February 2002 --- The INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES AND INFORMATION (IESI) dedicated to the opening of the European Convention:

- a **special page on its internet site** www.cesbg.org (in Bulgarian) containing the texts of Bulgarian and European public interventions, documents and studies, including an exhaustive archive of official positions of EU member states and candidate countries during 2001;
- a **special study** on the EU's forthcoming institutional and policy reforms: Nikolov, Krassimir Y. **"We in the European Convention"** (in Bulgarian).

7. Between April and June 2002 --- The EUROPEAN INSTITUTE organises a series of debates on the "Future of Europe" and the European Convention in the following cities:

- Blagoevgrad – with representatives of the student councils (April);
- Russe – with professional organisations (April & May);
- Lovech, Montana, Gotse Delchev, Shumen & Yambol – with NGO representatives (May & June);
- Varna – with regional and municipal administrators (June).

8. Between April and November 2002 --- The COLLEGE OF EUROPE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, jointly with SEVEN BULGARIAN UNIVERSITIES throughout the country, carries out a project **"Animating the "Future of Europe" debate among students and lecturers in Bulgarian Universities"**, which has a two-fold objective:

- (a) to spread more knowledge about the "Future of Europe" debate among an enlightened public of Bulgarian academia & youth (professors, assistant professors, doctoral, M.A. & B.A. students);
- (b) to encourage analysis and the formulation of informed views of this target group on the Convention and on Bulgaria's role as a future EU member.

The project comprises the following activities:

- monthly workshops linking the official representatives of Bulgaria with academia, at the leading universities in the capital:
 - Sofia University "St. Kliment Okhridski",
 - The New Bulgarian University – Sofia;
- five public lectures on the Convention in April-May 2002 at:
 - Veliko Tarnovo University "St. St. Cyril & Methodius",
 - Plovdiv University "St. Paisii Hilendarski",
 - Russe University,
 - Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar",
 - The American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad;
- five academic discussions in July and September 2002 at the same universities;
- publication of reports, comments and analyses on the topical issues standing on the Convention's agenda in the series "We in the European Debate";
- a conference on the Future of Europe in November 2002 in Sofia and publication of the conference speeches and contributions.

9. Between May 2002 and May 2003 --- the CENTRE FOR LIBERAL STRATEGIES carries out a project focused on **elaborating policy briefs** on a monthly basis, where the main topics included in the Convention's discussion will be analysed.

- These papers will give a comparative overview of the positions taken by the 15 EU member states and the 13 candidate countries taking part in the Convention, of the MEPs and other participants in the discussions within the Convention.
- The target groups to be approached are: * the Bulgarian members of the Convention and the Bulgarian MPs from the European Integration Committee, ** Bulgarian youth taking part in the Youth Convention, *** leading Bulgarian journalists.

10. Between June and November 2002 --- the BALKAN YOUTH CLUB organises a series of **“European Seminars”** gathering young people from around the country in order to debate issues linked both to Bulgaria's accession negotiations and to the future design, political content and institutional construction of a United Europe that Bulgarians want to be part of.

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