

COVER NOTE

from : Secretariat

to : Convention

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

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

Christiansborg, 14 June 2002

To

The European Convention

Summary of the Danish Debate on the Future of Europe

Initiators of the debate in Denmark on the Future of Europe include a broad spectrum of different institutions and associations in the Danish society. The debate has to a certain extent been interlinked with the priorities and challenges for the upcoming Danish EU-presidency. The coincidence of these two major events could hopefully promote a broad and engaged debate on European policy-issues. It would also be a great opportunity to broaden the national EU-debate which during the last decade has been dominated by the themes set by the several Danish EU-referenda. Now it is time for a broad and fundamental debate on the future of Europe well ahead of the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004.

In the following I will give an expression of the progress of the national debate in Denmark on the Future of Europe. Among the initiators of the Danish debate special emphasis will be put on the activities of the European Affairs Committee in the Danish Parliament, but also a number of other activities and organisations will be presented.

The European Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament, Folketinget, has until yet arranged one public hearing on The Future of Europe, and are planning three more hearings (September 2002, December 2002 and March 2003). The first hearing was held the 6 May 2002. Invited as speakers were the Minister for European Affairs Bertel Haarder and the two full members of the Convention from the Danish Parliament, Henrik Dam Kristensen and Peter Skaarup. The EU-spokespersons from the political parties were also invited and had the opportunity to ask questions and take part in discussions with the speakers. Also a wide range of interest groups, ministerial departments, universities, students and the media were invited and had the possibility to take part in the debate. While this first hearing had a very general character the following three hearings will be focused on more delimited, thematized policy-areas. The hearing in May demonstrated a high degree of willingness to engage in discussions of the future challenges for Europe, but it also gave an impression of the existence of very different attitudes to the EU and the future organisation of Europe.

To further facilitate the debate on the Future of Europe The EU Information Centre in the Danish Parliament has build up a very well equipped website which for instance include the official Convention documents and thorough written summaries on the meetings in the Convention and also from the preparatory meetings for the national parliamentarians. The website – <http://www.eu-konvent.dk> – also contains an English version. At the EU Information Centre's website it is also possible for all with access to the internet to participate in a web-dialogue on the future of Europe.

It should also be mentioned that on the Danish State Budget 2002, 20 mio. dkr. (approximately 2,7 mio. euro) has been earmarked to information activities concerning the EU. Individuals as well as groups in the society can apply for financial support at the politically independent Board for EU Information set down by the Ministry of Education. A similar amount will be granted for 2003 and 2004.

Besides the before mentioned public hearings arranged by the European Affairs Committee, a number of seminars and conferences on the Future of Europe has been held this spring. Here the very well visited annual Conference in May, arranged by the European Commission's and the European Parliament's Representations in Copenhagen could be emphasised. The second day of the Conference was devoted to the European Convention. The Danish members of the Convention and the national parliamentarians, members of the European Parliament and governments representative formed a panel and gave brief presentations of their visions for the work of the Convention. Afterwards a lively debate took place among the members of the Convention and the audience. Even though the members of the Convention did not share the same visions for the future EU, a certain level of consensus seemed obtainable on issues like the need for increased transparency and openness and a strengthened involvement of national parliaments in the EU-decision making process.

I will also briefly mention a conference arranged by the Danish Association for EU law, which took place the 29 May 2002. Minister for European Affairs Bertel Haarder and member of the Convention Henrik Dam Kristensen and professor dr. jur. Henning Koch, Copenhagen University, were among the main speakers. Main issues being dealt with was whether EU should have a constitution and how the division of competences between EU Institutions and the nationstates could be made more clear.

Finally I will draw your attention to the great initiative named Youth 2002, which will gather around 1.000 young people from all EU-member states, applicant countries and the Balkans, at thirteen folk high schools in Denmark, in the first two weeks of July 2002. The debate actually started 1 May this year in a web dialogue which will run for nine weeks. At the beginning of the Conference in Denmark, a number of workshops will be established and their deliberations will end with the drafting of recommendations for a future European Constitution. The recommendations will be translated to 25 different languages and distributed to 30.000 European organisations and decision makers. The EU Information Centre of the Danish Parliament will provide these young people with different kind of technical support.