

COVER NOTE

from : Secretariat

to : Convention

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

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

THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN FINLAND

In Finland, the government has put a lot of effort in activating the debate on the future of the EU. The goal has been to attempt to stimulate the debate by providing information and organising events where views can be exchanged.

The key initiatives have been the following:

The **Civil Forum on the Future of the EU**, consisting of representatives of the civil society (NGO's, interest groups, political parties, universities, labour unions and employers' organisations etc.) has met five times.

The inaugural meeting was held on September 14th 2001 and was chaired by Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen. On the agenda were the national preparations and the main themes of the debate. The second meeting was held on October 12th, under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja and Minister for Trade and Industry Kimmo Sasi, and it concentrated on enlargement and its implications for the future of the union. The third meeting took place on December 4th, and its main theme was the Laeken declaration, in particular the decisions concerning the preparation of the next IGC. The fourth meeting on April 10th concentrated on the Convention; all Finland's representatives in the Convention were present and explained their views about the future of Europe and answered questions from the participants. The theme of the fourth meeting was Council reform and the role of the EU in the world.

Each time, 90 different organisations from all ends of the spectrum have been invited to participate. The forum has attracted considerable attention. A shadow meeting by EU-critical organizations was organised in parallel to its first meeting, and some EU-critical organizations have chosen, not to participate in its work, but in general the response has been very positive.

The Forum is to meet 1-2 times per Presidency, in particular before each European Council meeting. The forum will also be used to keep the participants informed of the work of the Convention. Meetings on special topics can be organised according to need and interest.

A **website** titled "**My Europe**" was opened on October 26th at www.minuneurooppa.fi and respectively in Swedish www.mitteuropa.fi. The website is bilingual (general information is also available in English), and hosts three discussion groups: "*enlarging Union*", "*reforming the Union*" and "*a safe Europe*". The website contains a database providing information (speeches, articles, information notes, research reports etc.) on the issues involved, as well as a calendar of EU-related activities (discussions, seminars, meetings etc.) open to the public. Finland's representatives in the Convention have posted their ideas about the future of EU on the website, and have also participated in the discussion there.

Citizens, NGO's etc. are encouraged to participate in the discussion groups, to contribute material containing their positions concerning the future of the EU and to send information on the EU-related activities they are organising. The attempt is also to answer all questions sent to the website. This way it is hoped, that more people are attracted to contribute to the debate and that organisations find partners with whom they can cooperate on the matter.

To inform the citizens on the debate elsewhere in Europe, Finnish Press Attachés in all EU and applicant Country capitals have been asked to write short reports on the local debate. The website also contains links to both Futurum and the websites created for the discussion on the Future of the Union in other Member States and applicant countries.

The network of Europe Information Centers as well as the Carrefour network play an important role, when it comes to spreading the debate across the country.

The national debate is envisaged to continue at least until 2004, and new projects and ideas may, of course, emerge in the course of the discussion. Initiatives from the public are especially hoped for. The aim is to try to broaden the debate to better cover the whole country.

Arrangements for the national debate on the future of the EU are being prepared by the Government Secretariat for EU Affairs and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. For more information on the arrangements, please contact:

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