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CONV 207/02**CONTRIB 70**

from :	Secretariat
to :	Convention
Subject:	Contribution from Ms Inese Birzniece, alternate member of the Convention : The future of the European Union

The Secretary-General of the Convention has received the contribution annexed hereto from Ms Inese Birzniece, alternate member of the Convention.

CONV 207/02

Latvia's National Convention On the future of the European Union

1. GOALS OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

Latvia's National Convention on the future of the European Union is planned as a broad and regular public discussion on both the issues concerning the EU's future and the issues relating to Latvia's accession to the EU. The National Convention is Latvia's national counterpart to the EU Convention on the future of Europe. Thus, to a certain extent, the National Convention serves as one means for Latvia's delegates to the EU Convention to receive suggested guidelines as to particular issues relating to proposed reforms of the EU.

2. ORGANIZATION

The non-governmental organization European Movement-Latvia, together with the Latvian Government, has jointly organized the formation of the National Convention. An executive committee of 45 members met to launch the National Convention and formed the agenda for the first meeting of the National Convention, held on May 9, 2002.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared the list of individuals invited to participate in the National Convention. The Government's European Integration Bureau handled the technical arrangements and other implementation tasks (including information to the mass media, information on Internet site, and preparation of the reports and discussion materials).

3. PARTICIPANTS

Taking into account that the National Convention's main goal is to facilitate the discussion about the European Union with the broad public sector, the National Convention is organized as an open event in which any interested person may participate. About 300 individuals from different social groups received individual invitation. These invited participants represented a wide spectrum of society including:

-Members of the Public European Integration Council (a quarterly discussion forum organized by the European Movement-Latvia with the Latvian Government about various topics relating to Latvia's accession to the EU)

- Other individuals involved with the process of integrating Latvia into the EU as a full member state
- Representatives from the higher education establishments and the Latvian Academy of Sciences
- Representatives from a variety of non-governmental organizations
- Representatives from the professional associations (such as lawyers, doctors)
- Representatives from the national/ethnic cultural associations
- Representatives from arts, culture and sports spheres
- Representatives from religious organizations
- Experts from the various Government ministries

4. FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

The first meeting of Latvia's National Convention on the future of the European Union was held on May 9, 2002 at the Riga Latvian Society House with more than 210 participants. This meeting was broadcast live on the Latvian State Radio.

Latvia Prime Minister Andris Berzins made the opening address, stressing the fact that it is most crucial, given our 20th century historical experience, that we actively participate in the EU Convention work and not be passive onlookers allowing others to decide in our name. Foreign Affairs Minister Indulis Berzins focused on the need for a new European policy, one which would ensure the competitiveness of the individual, of peoples and of states in the Latvia and Europe of the future. Ainars Dimants, President, European Movement-Latvia, emphasized the need for each person to individually study, analyze and be informed about the connection between each individual and the European Union.

Three panel discussions were held on 1) Latvia's sovereignty in the future Europe, 2) Latvia's identity in the future Europe, and 3) Latvia's role in the future Europe. Latvia's delegates to the EU Convention made introductory speeches as to each theme, followed by other presentations and general discussions.

Not surprisingly, the discussions focused on the second dimension, namely issues surrounding Latvia's accession to the EU. The public is much more interested in its immediate future as a future EU member state than in discussions about the EU Convention and institutional reforms. Their knowledge of EU Convention-related issues is also much lower.

The Government's European Integration Bureau has created an e-mail address for any and all comments and suggestions relating to the National Convention (convents@eib.lv) and also has included a separate listing for the National Convention on its website.

5. FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

The next meeting of the National Convention will be in late August, again broadcast over the Latvian State Radio. Its focus will be the current working group topics of the EU Convention. Each EU Convention delegate from Latvia will chair one working group and introduce a discussion of the working group's topic. Each working group will be encouraged to reach proposed conclusions and guidelines about each particular topic (subsidiarity, role of national parliaments, Charter of Fundamental Rights, common foreign and security policy, and so forth). These proposed conclusions could be used by Latvia's EU Convention members in forming their opinions about the EU Convention's future specific reports and texts. Each Latvia delegate will also present a short overview of the current discussions in his/her own respective working groups. Latvia's members to the Youth Convention will also be participating in the future meetings of the National Convention.

Inese Birzniece

Latvia member to the EU Convention