

EUROPESE CONVENTIE

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- Polen

Voor de leden van de Conventie gaat hierbij het verslag over het nationaal debat over de toekomst van Europa in Polen.

Warsaw, 14 June 2002

**Information on national debate in Poland
about the future of the European Union**

The public debate in Poland has intensified after the Summit of Laeken and the beginning of works of the Convention of the future of Europe in February 2002. The leading role in this discussion is played by the Polish representatives to the Convention, both parliamentarians and the Government representative. They initiate and participate in many events gathering the civil society: social partners, non-governmental organisations, opinion makers, politicians, representatives of the local governments, media, academic circles, young people.

It is equally important to mention that the debate on the future of Europe and the institutional structure of the EU has started in Poland few years ago, with the debate on Nice Treaty and preparation to launch the Convention. It has taken the form of conferences, publications, speeches delivered by politicians and social partners, voices of NGOs and the Catholic Church, presented both in Poland and abroad. The discussion consisted *inter alia* of a contribution of the then Chief Negotiator made at the ELEC conference in Berlin in June 2000 to the discussion initiated a month earlier by Minister Joschka Fischer; Poland's position on the future the EU presented in Warsaw by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2001; participation of the Polish parliament representatives in the sittings of the constitutional commission of the European Parliament devoted to the future of the EU (March and July 2001); the addresses delivered by the President and the Prime Minister in Stockholm and Brussels respectively in 2001. At a conference in November 2001 preceding the Laeken summit, Polish NGOs expressed their views on European affairs.

In the debate the main topic and issues of interest are: the balance of powers in the European Union, the future shape of its institutions, the democratic character, accountability and transparency in the EU, the implementation of the subsidiarity principle, role of regions and regional cooperation as well as of local governments, the meaning of the solidarity principle in the EU practice, the position and role of Poland as a future member in a renewed Union. The characteristic feature of this debate is that the subjects staying in focus of the Convention's works are discussed together and mixed with the issues connected with the accession negotiations and to Poland's EU membership as such. The role of the Polish representatives to the Convention is to steer up the discussion about the future shape of the Union and proved with the incentives to think and debate in terms of responsibility for the common future of the European Union.

While accounting for the progress of the national debate on the future of the European Union, one must underline the initiatives of the Polish parliament. Worth mentioning in this context are regular consultations between the European affairs committees of the upper and lower Chambers as well as their joint meetings with experts within the framework of parliamentary debate. Special sessions of both Chambers' EU committees have been dedicated in March and April 2002 to the future of Europe debate and the work of the Convention; during the plenary sessions of the Parliament the issue of the future of Europe has also been discussed. Furthermore, on the initiative of the Polish delegates to the Convention, a number of conferences, meetings and public speeches, have been organised both in the parliament and in local venues (self-governments and business organisations, universities, European clubs in schools) outside Warsaw such as Gdańsk, Gdynia, Częstochowa, Cracow, Łódź, Tarnów, Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Kielce, Siedlce and Opole. The parliamentary representatives of other countries to the Convention (such as those of France, Germany, Great Britain) are being invited by the Polish parliamentary representatives and meeting

with them enjoy big public interest.

Following the results of the EU summit in Laeken, whereby the member states and applicant countries have been invited to arrange for a nation-wide debate on the future of the European Union, in February 2002 the Government initiated a discussion forum "Together about the future of Europe". It is one of the key agents by means of which to organise a civic debate. It is coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the auspices of the President and the Prime Minister.

The forum seeks to create an open platform to enable voicing of views, opinions and proposals concerning Poland's position on most vital issues related to European institutions and common policies, its future framework and balance of powers. The initiative, on the one hand, goes beyond political and scientific circles, where a debate on a broadly interpreted future of Europe has evolved so far and, on the other hand, it reaches beyond the capital city and its élite, which allows for the potential of local leaders to be exploited during the debate, stimulating their activity and inviting to reflect on the European matters. A national character of the forum can be well perceived in the fact that representatives of numerous civic societies have been invited to participate in the debate, and also in offering Forum patronage to other initiatives of a similar character undertaken by various organisations all over the country. The forum involves representatives of self-government entities, NGOs, social partners, academic circles, the Catholic and other churches, media, political groups, teachers and youth.

Such a formula of the forum guarantees that instead of being devoted to intricate, technical and legal problems it has to do rather with the ideas, whereby European integration is to proceed, as well as with Poland's interests and its place in the united Europe. The ongoing debate is closely linked to the proceedings of the Convention, striving to devise the structural reforms of the European Union, so that it can serve as a backing for the Polish delegates to the Convention. Thus, the delegates can get a first-hand insight into the social perception of the Convention-debated issues, whereas those participating in the forum can be supplied with the latest news on the outcome of the institutionalised debate on ways to reform the EU. The forum was inaugurated on 18 February 2002 in Warsaw, in the presence of the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Polish delegates to the Convention on the future of European Union. The second meeting took place in Gdańsk on 12 April 2002 and it was dedicated to the issue of *European Union closer to its citizens*. It was attended by the Polish delegates to the Convention, as well as representatives of the Catholic Church, local self-government and economic-scientific groupings. The following forum, dubbed *European social model in 21 century – possibilities and threats*, was held in Częstochowa on 27 May 2002. It was followed by yet another one, which was organised in Poznań on 13 June 2002 and dealt with *Assignment of competences in the united Europe*. Other venues included in the agenda are: Wrocław (September 2002), Siedlce (October 2002) and Cracow (November 2002).

Within the framework of this nation-wide debate there is also room for guests from abroad sharing their ideas. February 2002 saw the conference „*Towards solidarity and co-operation*” presided by Jean-Luc Dehaene, Vice-President of the Convention, organised in Warsaw in co-operation with Notre Europe Foundation and Lucchini Foundation. In March 2002 Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament and Peter Hain, UK European Secretary, delivered public speeches in Warsaw. In May 2002 a public debate was held between the Polish government representative to the Convention and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Austria's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. June 2002 shall witness a meeting of the UE Commissioner Michel Barnier with the Polish delegates to the Convention.

Also self-government bodies, of local and regional level alike, are active in the debate. They organise conferences and meetings, while their representatives take part in discussions held on European fora (Committee of the Regions) and take positions at regional and subregional organisations (euroregions, Baltic Sea regions).

Very important to the development of Poland's stance on the future of Europe is the so-called Reflection Group, established by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in early 2001. The group involves several outstanding personalities of Poland's political, social and scientific circles. It holds regular debates to deal with the fundamental questions which are central to the discussion on the future of Europe (status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, subsidiarity, role of national parliaments).

An important participant of the national debate on the future of Europe are social partners and the NGOs. In May 2002, on the occasion of European Days in Poland, a seminar called "Convention for everyone" was held, to familiarise its participants with the way the genuine Convention is run and the problems it is dedicated to. At a conference to take place on 19 June 2002 which shall precede the Civic Forum, the representative of the Polish government to the Convention shall outline the hitherto outcome of the Convention's proceedings along with a forecast of its further development. The meeting will be an opportunity for Polish NGOs to express their views on the progress achieved so far by the Convention and on possible ways of efficient and complete involvement of civic society in the debate on the shape of a future expanded European Union.

Social partners and scientists are also richly represented in the Standing Expert Group, which lends its support to the Polish delegates to the Convention. The group constitutes an advisory body and recognises in their discussions and reports the multitude of views voiced by numerous circles in the course of the ongoing debate.

The Catholic Church plays a unique role in the consultations concerning the Convention-debated issues. The Polish representatives to the Convention hold regular meetings with its leaders. The participation in the debate of the Church and its hierarchy is considered in Poland as of great importance.

Mass media is yet another factor, which can greatly influence the European debate in Poland, even more so if we consider their capability of providing the broadest possible platform for the exchange of views and opinions by the citizens. It will be noted that such a debate has been going on in Poland's largest dailies and weeklies and in the electronic media between representatives of various influence-exerting circles, mainly commentators, politicians, economists and scientists.

An additional element to trigger a broad participation of the citizens in the debate on the future of the UE will be a web site dubbed „Futurum", which is about soon to be launched.
