

BEGELEIDENDE NOTA

van : het secretariaat

aan : de Conventie

Subject: Verslag over het nationaal debat over de toekomst van Europa:
 – Nederland

Voor de leden van de Conventie gaat hierbij het verslag over het nationaal debat over de toekomst van Europa dat in Nederland wordt gevoerd.

CONV 169/02

THE DUTCH DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**General**

Since the Nice European Council, the website on European integration and EU enlargement (www.europaportaal.nl) set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has highlighted the debate on the future of Europe, focusing most recently on the European Convention and the Youth Convention. The website features a special file on this debate containing related documents, reports of activities, useful links and a summary of recent media discussions on this theme. Political and social opinion leaders are also regularly canvassed for their views on the future of the EU. The Ministry also makes use of other media, such as a newsletter, an e-zine about Europe (also available by fax) and newspaper advertorials, in order to spark wider interest in the debate.

The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to inspire and facilitate activities that promote this debate, actively involving, and sharing responsibility with as many civil society organisations as possible.

The debate in the Netherlands takes several forms.

1. The debate on the "four points of Nice"

At the beginning of June 2001, the Dutch government submitted a memorandum to parliament on the four points set out in the Nice Declaration and Dutch priorities. Parliament debated the memorandum in the autumn of the same year. The government subsequently requested the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), a public body which advises it on issues including European integration, to look at these and other themes. The AIV published its advisory report on 19 June 2002. It is hoped that this report will help to stimulate the debate in parliament and the Netherlands as a whole.

2. Panel discussions with European experts

The European debate also takes the form of panel discussions with experts on European integration. In the first half of 2001, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Dick Benschoop, chaired two discussions with European experts from a number of countries.

3. Series of debates on controversial European issues

Certain themes have become important in the light of the future of the EU. Most of these themes are of at least potential interest to a broad public. They include such topics as agriculture, pensions, the role of the EU in the world and security in Europe. The debate series, which has been stepped up since last autumn, seeks to involve a wider public in discussion of the EU's future. Its aim is threefold:

- to stimulate public debate on the future of the European Union in general and EU enlargement in particular;

- to increase the general public's awareness and understanding of various European issues (particularly EU enlargement);
- to lay bare political dilemmas and involve the public in them.

It is important not to create false hopes as far as the results of these debates are concerned. The main objective is to get the public talking about Europe – chiefly by presenting speakers with strong standpoints – and not to formulate conclusions. So far three debates have been held (on agriculture, the economy and foreign and defence policy). The series will continue in the autumn.

4. Guest lectures

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to make active efforts to arrange guest lectures at Dutch universities on European enlargement and the future of Europe by ministers, state secretaries, Dutch MEPs, Dutch Convention Members and the Dutch Eurocommissioner. In autumn Dutch MEPs will also give a series of guest lectures at their old secondary schools.

5. Expert debates with Dutch Convention members

In June, three expert debates were held on the main themes of the European Convention, in close cooperation with a group of civil society organisations, the idea being to furnish Dutch members of the Convention with new ideas and approaches. The series will conclude with a public debate on 25 June.

6. Young people

A separate campaign has been set up for young people, linked to the Youth Convention. The idea is that in the coming year Dutch delegates will act as ambassadors for the European debate, encouraging other young people to take part in it. A number of activities are being organised, including an extensive Internet discussion. The kick-off will be a mini-conference on 22 June. On 19 June a large advertorial called public attention to the Youth Convention and the Dutch delegates. At the first meeting of the Youth Convention the delegates will report on their activities several times a day via Internet. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will also be actively helping youth organisations by providing manpower and funding, and will work closely with them to raise their profile in the media.

=====