

Report from the Presidency to the European Council: Report on the Debate on the Future of the European Union

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference in Nice in December 2000 opened the way for enlargement of the European Union. With ratification of the Treaty of Nice the European Union will have completed the institutional changes necessary for the accession of the new Member States.

2. The Nice Intergovernmental Conference, recognising the need to improve and monitor the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the Union and its institutions in order to bring them closer to citizens, manifested the ambition for the European Union to embark on a deeper and wider debate about its future(1). This is the first stage in the preparatory process which will lead to the convening of an Intergovernmental Conference in 2004 in order to make changes to the Treaties.

3. The Swedish and Belgian Presidencies, in cooperation with the Commission and involving the European Parliament, were accordingly invited to encourage wide-ranging discussions with all interested parties, including representatives of national parliaments, representatives reflecting public opinion (including political, economic and university circles), representatives of civil society and others. It was also agreed that candidate states would be associated in this process.

4. On 7 March 2001, the Swedish Presidency, the future Belgian Presidency and the Presidents of the European Parliament and the Commission issued a joint statement formally initiating the debate on the future development of the European Union. That statement calls for a debate which should reach out further than before to all sections of society. The expectation is that by building on many activity centres and on a multitude of contributions a debate will be encouraged which is broader in scope than before. It should highlight the basic challenges facing the European Union in the coming decades and stimulate suggestions for how to respond rationally to these challenges in terms of policy provisions, institutions and organisation of work.

5. In order to create a "citizens' forum" - a location at which all contributions to the debate can be assembled and made available, a "Future of Europe" website was opened on that same day(2). The first contributions to the debate were made by Prime Minister Persson, Prime Minister Verhofstadt and the President of the Commission, Mr Prodi, as inspiration for others.

6. On the same day, following up the launch of the debate, Prime Minister Persson wrote to his colleagues in the Member States and candidate countries welcoming their participation, *inter alia* by submitting contributions to the website by 15 June. Letters were also dispatched by Prime Minister Persson to the European Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, COSAC, and the social partners, with the same aim of securing their participation in the debate.

7. As will be amply shown below a vast array of initiatives are already being taken at this early stage in Member States, candidate countries and by the Union's institutions and deliberative bodies. All have been keen to embark on a genuinely open and wide-ranging debate on the future of the European Union in line with the spirit of the Nice Declaration. Momentum will undoubtedly be gained over the coming months as further contributions are injected into the debate and elicit reactions, comments and counter-responses.

8. On the basis of the summary of initiatives taken and of discussions to date in the Member States, candidate countries and by the Union's institutions, the Presidency offers in the concluding section an initial assessment of the prospects for the continuation of the process leading to the next Intergovernmental Conference.

II. INITIATIVES TAKEN TO STIMULATE THE NATIONAL DEBATE IN THE MEMBER STATES

9. Given the need for a process of open reflection preceding the political preparations for the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004, it is important that citizens in each Member State are actively engaged in the debate so that their expectations of the future European Union and their ideas on how the Union can be better equipped to meet the tasks ahead are properly aired. This section briefly summarises events organised and initiatives taken in the Member States as part of the debate on the future of the Union.

10. A number of initiatives have been launched in **Belgium** to carry the debate forward. **The Prince Philippe Fund has organised events to associate young people to the debate. The Flemish Community has organised in cooperation with the Walloon Region and other constitutional regions of other Member States a colloquium on 22 February 2001 on strengthening the role of constitutional regions in Europe. They have issued a joint declaration in view of the Laeken/Brussels European Council.** As part of the preparations of the Belgian Presidency, the government has also held meetings with NGOs and various policy associations, *inter alia* on the future of the Union. Further events are planned, including a colloquium to be organised by the Royal Institute for International Relations on candidate countries' vision of the development of the Union. Similar consultations with NGOs and representatives of civil society have been undertaken by the Belgian Parliament. Over the coming weeks, the government intends to make arrangements for structuring the exercise without diminishing the breadth of the debate.

11. The **Spanish** Government has launched the following two initiatives:

- the establishment of a specific parliamentary sub-committee to follow up the 2004 IGC, the fundamental objective of which is to examine and discuss the subjects for discussion at the IGC in order to establish Spain's negotiating position when the time comes;
- the creation of a "*Council for the debate on the future of the European Union*", composed of key figures from social, economic and academic spheres.

Apart from the above-mentioned initiatives, the following are also planned:

- the distribution of specific documentation concerning the debate on the future of the Union (a press and documentation bulletin is already being distributed; its circulation could increase and reach specific points of contact with civil society);
- technical seminars on the specific issues of the debate;
- proposals that large-circulation daily newspapers create a permanent section for citizens' contributions on the future of the Union;
- the holding of television and radio debates with the participation of members of the Council;
- school competitions on the future of Europe;
- an Internet web page which should be up and running in June;
- surveys on the European public's attitude to the European Union.

12. The first step in **Denmark** has been the government's decision to publish a white paper on Denmark and the EU in June. The objective of the white paper is to describe and analyse the most important questions on the European agenda in the years to come. All interested parties, including political parties, organisations and citizens, have been invited to contribute. In order to facilitate this process, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created an internet mailbox to enable interested parties to forward their contributions. Following the white paper, the government is planning various activities to promote a deep and wide debate about the future development of the EU. A website incorporating a discussion forum will be opened to provide access to relevant information and the government will hold public meetings to consult the people on their views. The government will encourage all political parties to engage actively in the debate and present their points of view. Other bodies, including the Advisory Council on European Affairs, a forum for debate and advice

on matters relating to the EU and the Board of EU Information, will be actively engaged in the debate by publishing analyses concerning the development of the European Union and organising public meetings.

13. The **Greek** government has encouraged a series of public events. A major conference took place on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Greece's accession to the European Union. The Hellenic Centre for European Studies (EKEM) is organising a major conference in Athens on 11 July on "the future of Europe and Greece" as well as a series of debates on the "future of Europe" with the participation of students, youth organisations, NGOs and pressure groups. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is active in a number of ways such as organising a brainstorming meeting with *inter alia* academics, officials from the European Commission and journalists, setting up an internal task force to work out ideas on the future of Europe, providing financial and technical assistance to regional universities etc., to organise public debates on the "future of Europe" and co-operating closely with the offices of the European institutions in Greece. Also the Greek Parliament and its Committee on European Affairs takes an active part in the debate. A website on the "future of Europe" will be inaugurated shortly and Greece is co-operating with neighbouring candidate countries to stimulate discussion on this issue.

14. Given the political situation in **Italy** in the first half of this year, it has not been possible so far to launch a comprehensive programme of debates, hearings and other initiatives on the future of Europe. As is well-known, the Parliament was dissolved by the President of the Republic on 8 March and general elections were held on 13 May. A steering role of different Ministries (among others, the Presidency of Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and other public agencies has been envisaged. A draft programme foresees actions to be taken in co-ordination with NGOs, academic institutions and social partners. The new Parliament was convened on 30 May and the new Government will be constituted in due form, according to the constitutional procedure, during the first half of June. As soon as the new Government assumes its duties, appropriate initiatives are likely to be taken in order to stimulate a wide forum of debate that will presumably be fully operational during the second half of the current year.

15. In **Ireland**, the government is at present finalising plans for structuring a national debate. The immediate priority for the government has been to complete the ratification of the Nice Treaty, including the holding of a referendum on 7 June. The government intends to bring forward proposals in the coming weeks regarding the form and the structure of the national debate, which it is hoped will involve a wide range of opinion in Ireland, including representatives of political parties, the social partners and others in civil society.

16. In recent months, the **Dutch** government has taken a number of initiatives to stimulate and encourage the debate. Several ministers have actively contributed through speeches, lectures and debates. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently opened a website (www.europaportaal.nl) and supports a fortnightly e-zine @europa. A government policy memorandum on the European Union was sent to the Dutch parliament in late May and it considers issues to be covered in the debate and how they should be addressed. This memorandum has been widely circulated in different languages. Further initiatives will be announced later in the year, including a structured internet debate and a large-scale public event to bring the debate on the future of the Union to the attention of a wider public.

17. The **Luxembourg** Parliament has already begun working on a report on the questions raised in the Nice Declaration and will hold public hearings on the future of Europe. The government is preparing a public brochure and questionnaire to be distributed to all households in Luxembourg on the future of Europe in late June. The Chamber of Deputies and the Foreign Ministry will open an interactive website during the summer which, among other things, will publicise the evaluation of the replies received to the questionnaire. Following an information phase, hearings will be organised with representatives of civil society from mid-September. Round table discussions and seminars will also be organised at the Chamber of Deputies drawing on the responses received to

the questionnaire. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister will both take part in the general debate through speeches and other contributions.

18. In the **United Kingdom**, senior politicians, including the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, have made a number of speeches underlining the benefits of EU membership and looking ahead to some of the principles that are likely to be addressed at the 2004 IGC. The Minister for Europe has undertaken an extensive series of regional and city visits throughout the UK, highlighting in local terms the benefits of EU membership and participating in public debates. Parliament has also taken up the issue of the future of Europe with a report due to be published by the House of Lords European Union Committee on the role of national parliaments, which specifically refers to the idea of a Second Chamber of the European Parliament. The Government has also begun a series of contacts with academics from around the UK and EU to stimulate discussion on the issues arising from the Future of Europe debate. Non-governmental initiatives include the BBC's "Europe Week" with a series of current affairs and news programmes, discussions, phone-ins and documentaries, as well as regular speeches by business representatives and representatives of civil society on European issues.

19. In **Austria**, a number of initiatives have already been taken and are planned by the Federal government, the national parliament, various regions and by the media, universities, NGOs and other private organisations. At federal level, a European Round Table, chaired by the Federal Chancellor, was organised on 30 May 2001 and brought together representatives of the Länder, the Austrian Parliament, the European Parliament, the social partners and representatives of civil society, including academic circles, for a discussion of views and ideas on the future of the Union. A follow-up round table, possibly with international participation, is likely to be organised in the autumn. **The lower Chamber of Parliament (Nationalrat) will hold a workshop on 20 June with deputies from both Chambers of Parliament, the Federal Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and other members of the Federal government, representatives of the Länder, the social partners, members of the European Parliament, academics and other experts. A follow-up is likely to be organised in October 2001. The upper Chamber (Bundesrat) will organise a hearing on subsidiarity on 27 June 2001. An official government website has been opened (www.austria.gv.at) to enable members of the public to participate in the debate.**

20. In **Germany**, the debate on the future of the Union gained momentum after the conclusion of the Treaty of Nice and the most recent opinion polls show a sharp increase in interest in the European Union. The biggest impact in stimulating the public debate has been made through public pronouncements by prominent political figures, such as those by President Rau to the European Parliament on 4 April and Prime Minister Clement of North Rhine-Westphalia on 28 February, which were widely reported in the media. In order to lend impetus to the debate, the Federal Chancellery has set up a political dialogue on Europe to promote the debate among political, economic and social decision-takers. Foreign Minister Fischer has also made a series of public appearances focusing on the future of Europe. A brochure on the Charter of Fundamental Rights was published in May. A comprehensive brochure on EU enlargement will be published in July by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an important contribution to the debate on the future of the Union. Citizens can also make known their views on an interactive website opened by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Further events are planned in the second half of the year, including the appointment of prominent personalities as "European Ambassadors".

21. **Finland** intends to encourage an open and broad-based discussion on all issues relating to the future of Europe by providing channels for participation and offering extensive information on the issues involved, without steering the debate. The government is currently working on four projects. First, a broad-based NGO forum consisting of representatives of civil society to discuss the issues chaired by the Prime Minister, Paavo Lipponen, will meet one to two times during each Presidency, beginning in September 2001. Second, a website on the future of an enlarging Union will be opened in September 2001 and will contain a discussion forum, a database on the issues involved, and links to websites in other Member States and the Commission. Third, the organisation of public debates,

seminars and other events on the future of Europe using the network of information centres throughout the country. Fourth, academics and researchers will be engaged through, inter alia, round table discussions, research projects and brainstorming sessions.

22. In order to ensure an involvement as wide as possible of all the components of the national public opinion, the **Portuguese** government has drawn up a plan of events aimed at engaging the citizen in the wide-ranging discussions underway. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with universities and institutes specialised in international affairs, will stimulate a large and in-depth debate on the future of Europe. The Portuguese Prime Minister formally launched the national debate on the future of the Union in an address to the Parliament on 31 May 2001 in which he called for an active participation of all political parties. An interactive page will be created in the near future in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A series of seminars and conferences on the future of the European Union is also being planned. The Parliament, in particular the Committee for European Affairs, has programmed a series of round tables and debates involving representatives of the political, economic and academic worlds. Civil society has already started its reflection. A seminar on "Enlargement: European identity and governance" took place recently with the opening session being presided by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. A conference on the political implications of the changes in the European Union after Nice will take place shortly.

23. The debate in **France** was launched by the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister on 11 April 2001. At national level, all the actors concerned with European affairs – including different ministries – were invited to promote the debate through initiatives of their choice. In particular the Presidents of both chambers (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) and the MEPs have been invited to give special attention to the exercise. At the same time, civil society, in particular the European associations, has been informed and encouraged to actively participate in this debate. At local level, the public authorities are responsible for organising regional forums involving local, national and European elected representatives, representatives of the economic and academic world as well as social partners and associations. The participation of people from other Member States and from candidate countries is also being encouraged. Finally, a group of ten personalities was created by the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister to contribute to the consistency of the debate and to produce the final synthesis. The first task of this group will be to draw up a document for the regional forums summarising the most important questions at stake. At the same time, several specific pages have been created on the Internet, including:

- the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.diplomatie.gouv.fr), which will provide and recall the official positions and reference texts as well as all the information on the regional forums and other public events;
- the site "Sources d'Europe" (www.info-europe.fr), the information centre common to the French government and the European Commission, will focus more specifically on the debate with citizens, through interactive exchanges – notably with the group of ten mentioned above – and the collection of contributions to this debate. All events contributing to the national debate will be listed on this site.

24. In **Sweden**, a parliamentary committee has been appointed by the government to promote and stimulate a broad and open national debate, put all issues relating to the future of Europe on the agenda, create an interplay between the public debate and the political process before and during the IGC, and link the debate in Sweden to the debate in other parts of Europe. This committee is composed of representatives of the seven political parties represented in the Swedish Parliament. Various activities are currently being considered, including an interactive website, efforts to reach out to young people and other groups seldom exposed to EU issues, cooperation with schools and public libraries, meetings and seminars, publications and cooperation and contacts with academia in Sweden and abroad. On 9 May, the Swedish Parliament debated the future of the Union, adopting a Committee report, which set out views on the four issues specified in the Nice Declaration, as well as reflections on the continuing process. In addition, members of the Swedish government have participated widely in the growing national debate on the future of Europe, including in a seminar held in mid-May in Sundsvall, Sweden, with an opening address by Foreign Minister Anna Lindh and with the participation of the European Parliament, the Commission, the Swedish Parliament,

academia and representatives of the youth organisations of the Swedish political parties. Moreover, during the Swedish Presidency substantial efforts have been made to raise the level of knowledge and stimulate debate about the European Union through school projects, a website, exhibitions, brochures as well as meetings and seminars in Stockholm and all around the country.

III. INITIATIVES TAKEN TO STIMULATE THE NATIONAL DEBATE IN THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

25. Although candidates are principally focused on preparations for enlargement, most of them have already taken action to stimulate the national debate on the future of the Union. Others are planning substantive initiatives in the near future.

26. As a first step, the foreign minister of **Bulgaria** has taken part in and widened the national debate with a lecture tour of universities during March and April. The aim is to involve parliament in the debate after the elections on 17 June.

27. The **Czech Republic** aims to include the whole of civil society and the national parliament in the debate. The topic of the future of Europe has also been included in the Czech Government's Public Communication Strategy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' aim is to involve visiting Foreign Ministers from the candidate countries and the Member States in the public debate. During bilateral visits they are invited to find time to discuss the future of Europe with ordinary citizens.

28. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with researchers from the European Institute of **Cyprus**, is promoting at this stage a project that deals with the debate on the future of Europe. The project aims at firstly creating the necessary conditions for holding a public debate to be launched soon and secondly to give the academic overview of the issue enabling the government to finalise its position and policy on these matters.

29. Since the beginning of May a special page on the future of the Union has been created on the **Estonian** Foreign Ministry's website. The Foreign Ministry has sent letters to members of parliament, other government departments, universities etc. to encourage all to participate in the national debate and put forward views, thoughts and ideas about the future of the Union. The parliament and the government in Estonia are also planning a national conference to discuss the future of Europe in November. Tentative plans have been made to arrange round-table discussions in the autumn.

30. In **Hungary** the public debate is planned to be launched through a gathering in the national parliament on 5 June. A national web page for the future debate will be opened on the same day, which will also link up to the European web page managed by the Commission.

31. In **Lithuania** a special road map has been presented which foresees, *inter alia*, a series of meetings with representatives of political parties, academia and 'round-table' gatherings. Contacts between government, political parties, and the academic world have already been established and are to be extended. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will also open its own website for the debate.

32. In a newspaper article, the **Latvian** Foreign Minister urged the Latvian people to participate in the debate on the future of Europe. The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also creating a special discussion site on its home page, where everybody is invited to express their opinion. Debates on the subject have also been held in the Parliament.

33. In **Malta** the Commission's representation will be providing information on the EU to various sectors of civil society. The government has also taken actions to inform citizens through the Malta EU Information Centre.

34. The government of **Poland** has taken action to inform citizens about the European Union and the ongoing integration process through information meetings, workshops and seminars. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stimulated the debate by *inter alia* presenting a comprehensive

analysis of the Nice Treaty. On 28 May Foreign Minister Bartoszewski delivered a speech on the future of Europe. The President of Poland has also set up a reflection group to bring together politicians, scientists, cultural personalities and other influential persons for regular discussions on the European Union. (See also para 43)

35. The official launch of the future debate in **Romania** took place on 9 May ("Europe Day"). A large number of local working groups have been established to organise a broad debate on the future of the Union. They were invited to an "open house" for the public. In September these local working groups will participate in a national debate on the future where they are invited to present the results of their local discussions. Before the Laeken European Council, the conclusions from the discussions will be put together. The Ministry for European Integration has also established a national web page.

36. **Slovakia** has set up a "National Convention on the European future of Slovakia" composed of political parties, churches, universities, civil servants, NGOs and various interest groups to discuss all aspects of the debate and present a realistic vision of the European Union. A report is likely to be ready by the end of the year which will constitute a basis for further debate in Slovakia.

37. The government urged the different parties in the **Slovenian** parliament in March to contribute to the debate on the future of the Union which will lead to a special debate in parliament. A parliamentary hearing on the future of Europe was organised in May. An action plan to engage both the general public and the political establishment in a discussion on the future of the Union has been prepared and is to be approved by the government in June. It will include *inter alia* arranging public debates and stimulating discussions in schools and at universities. A new web page inviting debate will be launched in early June. The European Affairs Committee in the parliament has announced its intention to discuss these issues regularly during the autumn.

38. Various NGOs in **Turkey** intend to establish a special national web page to enable the general public to contribute their opinions on the Union. A summary will be made of these contributions and forwarded as the Turkish contribution to the "Future of the Union" web page run by the European Commission.

IV. INITIATIVES TAKEN TO STIMULATE THE DEBATE AT THE LEVEL OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

The Presidency

39. Following the joint statement issued on 7 March by the Presidency and the future Presidency, the Presidency of the European Parliament and the President of the Commission, the Presidency has taken a number of initiatives.

40. On 14 March the Swedish Presidency made a Council statement in the European Parliament on the debate on the future of the EU, in which the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh, stressed, among other things, the importance of maintaining the greatest possible openness throughout the process. The aim was to bring the Union and its institutions closer to the citizens. She also professed that citizens' interests would go far beyond the examples of institutional issues raised at Nice.

41. On 30 March the Presidency organised a seminar to initiate an exchange of experience of the best methods for communicating these types of issues to citizens and of realising a broad and deep debate. A network of contacts for the website was organised, comprising both Member States and candidate countries. Its task will be to keep the site continually updated.

42. On 9 April the Presidency initiated a first informal discussion among Member States at ministerial level to elucidate the issues mooted in the national debates and the alternatives envisaged by Member States for the various phases of preparation from now until the

Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. The possible need for technical preparation of some of the issues indicated at Nice was also discussed.

43. Together with the Presidency, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a conference on the future of the EU in Warsaw on 23 April. Senior officials from Member States and candidate countries and a number of academics took part. Both substance and procedure were discussed, focusing on the first four issues indicated at Nice: a more exact delimitation of powers in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the future status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, simplification of the treaties and the role of the national parliaments.

44. Ministers from Member States and candidate countries met on 5-6 May in Nyköping (in conjunction with the informal meeting of EU foreign minister) to discuss jointly for the first time the matters referred to under para 42 above.

The Commission

45. On 25 April, the Commission presented a communication entitled "Certain arrangements for the debate on the future of the Union", which puts forward some ideas for reflection regarding the methods and tools needed to accompany the debate in order to make it a success(3). In addition to administering the "Future of Europe" website, the Commission has also been developing contacts with organisations representing civil society at the European level in order to assist them in networking and cross-fertilising the debate. The Commission is envisaging cooperating with other institutions to coordinate the various initiatives being taken and to promote the debate's European dimension. Moreover, the Commission President and members of the college have been taking part in various initiatives as part of the debate, including delivering speeches and participating in public debates. The Commission has highlighted that alongside the national evaluation which will have to be made of each national debate, a collective evaluation should also be made at European level, and that the Union's institutions should reflect together on how the various national summaries and digests could be made operational.

The European Parliament

46. On 20 March, the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs arranged a conference for representatives of the national parliaments in Member States and candidate countries. Issues discussed included the future of the Union and preparations for the next Intergovernmental Conference. The Commission and the Council, represented by its President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh, also took part.

47. Following a plenary debate on 30 May with the participation of the Presidency and the Commission, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union on 31 May. The resolution endorses Declaration 23 to the Final Act of the Treaty of Nice "because it constitutes an innovation in the procedure for a reform of the Treaties based on efficient shared preparations and preceded by wide-ranging and thorough public debate" and expresses *inter alia* the view that the debate should take place at both European and national level, must be open to society as a whole and must be accompanied by an appropriate information campaign in order to explain to Europeans what is at stake and encourage them to participate actively in the debate. As far as the more structured preparatory process is concerned the European Parliament advocates in its resolution the establishment of a Convention, to start work at the beginning of 2002, comprising members of the national parliaments, the European Parliament, the Commission and the governments. The European Parliament also states in its resolution that it "believes that the IGC should be convened to meet in the second half of 2003 so as to enable the new treaty to be adopted in December of that year, thereby ensuring that, in 2004, the European elections can act as a democratic fillip to European integration and that it, together with the Commission, will be able to play its part in that process under the best possible conditions".

The Economic and Social Committee

48. In March, the Economic and Social Committee created an *ad hoc* group which is mandated to follow actively and constructively the debate on the future of the Union. Initially, this group's task is to draw up the ESC contribution to the Brussels-Laeken Declaration on the agenda, method and timetable with the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference in prospect. The Committee will be holding a hearing on 17 July in order to seek the views of European civil society organisations. In its opinion of 25 April 2001 on "Organised civil society and European governance – the Committee's contribution to the White Paper", the Committee has already highlighted the need not to limit participation of organised civil society simply to the public debate but to involve it fully throughout the preparatory process for the Intergovernmental Conference. The Committee would like to play fully its role in speaking out for the expectations and requests of the economic and social components of organised civil society represented in the Committee. In doing so, it will also involve civil society actors in the candidate countries in its reflection on the future of Europe. In order to work effectively as a link between the institutional debate and the broad public discussion, it considers that it should, within the limits of its powers, be fully integrated into the structure which will be put in place to prepare the next Intergovernmental Conference. Further events are planned by the Committee.

The Committee of the Regions

49. As part of its contribution to the debate, the Committee of the Regions, in addition to expressing its own views in a resolution adopted on 5 April 2001, has organised a series of events focused on "the need to improve and to monitor the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the Union and its institutions, in order to bring them closer to the citizens of the Member States". Among the events planned by the Committee are four public debates in the context of the European Commission's initiative "Dialogue on Europe", to be held during COR commission meetings in Sweden and during the First Conference on Proximity (Salamanca, 21/22 June 2001). The Salamanca conference will bring together members of the Committee and other representatives of cities and communities, including some representatives of candidate countries. Representatives of the main European associations representing the regional and local authorities will also be involved in this debate, as well as representatives of other Community institutions (the Commission, the Parliament and the Council). The Committee intends to organise further events during the second half of 2001.

The Conference of European Affairs Committees of national Parliaments and the European Parliament (COSAC)

50. COSAC has set out its position in a detailed contribution to the European Council which underlines the particular role of parliaments in the debate. It stresses that given their closeness to voters, parliaments can function as a link between citizens and the debate at European level. As far as the more structured preparatory process leading up to the next IGC is concerned, COSAC considers that national parliaments need to be given a strong and early role. As part of the preparations for the IGC 2004, it advocates convening a conference based on the model of the convention used for drafting the Charter of Fundamental Rights to develop proposals for EU reform. COSAC intends to meet regularly during each presidency in the run-up to 2004, and has set up a working group to study the issues mentioned in the Nice Declaration. Moreover, a meeting of the conference of speakers of EU parliaments will take place in Stockholm in September to discuss the role of national parliaments in the European structure.

V. THE CONTINUING PROCESS

51. The Treaty amendments that may be agreed at the end of the process now embarked upon will be decided by the governments of Member States in accordance with the provisions of Article 48 of

the Treaty on European Union. The common task now is to ensure that the negotiations rest on a solid and objective foundation based on broad debate and a preparatory process characterised by the greatest possible openness and transparency. Representatives of Member States and candidate countries alike stress that the debate should be encouraged to continue in the years to come and that it be permitted to form the general basis for defining the issues to be discussed at the Intergovernmental Conference. In practical terms this approach means that the agenda for the Intergovernmental Conference neither can nor should be defined until later in the process.

52. In general, the process up to 2004 may be seen as three phases which will be successively concretised and defined: open reflection, structured reflection and the actual Intergovernmental Conference. The initiation of the first phase has been the key task of this Presidency. There is however now reason to start considering the parameters of the second period, that of structured reflection.

53. In the course of the discussions to date, different models have been mentioned as possibilities for continued preparation. When these are assessed, consideration must be given to the desire not to prematurely limit the debate or the scope of the future agenda. The debate in the first few months confirms the prediction that the next Intergovernmental Conference will need to address changes to the Treaties in policy areas as well as a number of institutional issues, including those emphasised at Nice.

54. As far as the period of structured reflection is concerned, the use of a group of government representatives at some suitable point in the process has been advanced as one element. This is a well tried method and was most recently applied in the run-up to the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Amsterdam. The advantage of an arrangement of this type is that it facilitates acquisition by governments and national parliaments of a sound grasp of the negotiating material and options at a relatively early stage, thereby providing a seamless transition to the formal negotiations. Critics tend to consider that a group of this kind would not be appropriate as the sole forum for the continued preparation, given the ambitions of a broader based process expressed in the Nice Declaration. It might therefore be more appropriate to define a possible role for a group of this type later in the process, as a bridge to the formal Intergovernmental Conference.

55. The setting up of a small group of wise men and women has also been proposed. A smaller group working with a greater measure of freedom of action could stimulate the debate by contributing interesting ideas on many of the challenges the Union faces. Those who criticise this model point out that a limited group of individuals at the European level would to some extent be in conflict with the jointly expressed interest in a continued broad and unbiased debate, in which all ideas and national perspectives are represented.

56. The concept of creating a broad and open preparatory forum has attracted great interest in the initial discussions, both in present and future Member States. Its advocates envisage an open structure, similar, but not necessarily corresponding to, the convention that successfully prepared the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The European Parliament has in its resolution of 31 May very firmly suggested the "convention model". It has also been suggested by COSAC to be a part of the preparations, and has been advanced by some individual political leaders as well. The political nature and the practical operation of such an open preparatory forum would depend on a number of partly interrelated factors. Among the most important ones are the choice of participants, the time frame for the work of the forum, the formulation of the overall task given to it, modalities for participation of candidate countries and the forum mechanisms for internal management and decisions. The total size of the forum and the balance between the contingents of participants would also be central issues. Formulation of the individual mandates of the participants can also be added to the above issues. Such mandates could potentially vary, depending on the sending bodies and national constitutional requirements.

57. The majority of those who have made concrete statements on the matter seem to agree that a possible open preparatory forum should be based on the participation of representatives of national

governments, national parliaments, the European Parliament and the Commission. A few have indicated a need to consider also the participation of NGOs in some form. Furthermore, most seem to envisage an open forum appointed in sufficiently good time for it to be able to contribute to and enrich the public debate without prematurely limiting or forestalling the latter. Several have stressed that an opportunity must be given to confirm the support of citizens for the results of the forum's work, in good time before the Intergovernmental Conference. That argument would point towards a forum whose work would begin early in 2002 and be completed within about a year.

58. The conditions for an open forum may, depending on the mandate extended to it, differ considerably from those that applied to the convention used for the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The tasks are likely to be even more complicated, definitely more diverse and to a lesser extent based on already existing instruments, making meaningful political discussion more difficult. This fact would, according to some, point in favour of extensive technical and legal preparatory work beforehand or in tandem with the operation of the forum. The issue of simplification of the treaties has been mentioned as a candidate for such expert work.

59. Another complication would be that the agenda might not be determined when the work of the forum commences nor when it is completed. A final decision on the agenda will lie in the hands of Member States. Logically the forum would thus be tasked with recommending an agenda and alternative ways of dealing with issues to be raised in the conference – based on impressions of the public debate that will be conducted simultaneously.

60. Given the nature of the Union, there is an obvious need for cross-border exchanges of the ideas generated in national debates. One way of ensuring that experience and impressions of the national debates are turned to good account might be to summarise them nationally in a suitable manner. It would be for each state to decide on the method for drawing up a synthesis of the contributions to the debate at national level. These summaries could be presented to successive incoming presidencies during the period leading up to the Intergovernmental Conference.

61. To conclude, there is a strong current of opinion favouring that the next Intergovernmental Conference should be preceded by a phase of structured reflection including an open forum with wider participation than that preceding previous IGCs and also associating candidate countries. Several arguments speak in favour of such a forum starting its work rather early in the process and for combining it with other appropriate measures since no single model for the preparations appears to meet all the requirements. It is suggested that the European Council in Laeken in December 2001 should agree on appropriate initiatives along the above lines for the continuation of the process.

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Footnotes:

(1) See Declaration No. 23 to the Final Act of the Treaty of Nice.

(2) <http://europa.eu.int/futurum> [archived on 28/04/08 at http://ec.europa.eu/archives/futurum/index_en.htm]

(3) See document 8370/01