

To mark the opening of the debate on the future of Europe, message from Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission (7 march 2001)

The Treaty of Nice, resulting from negotiations between the 15 current Member States of the European Union, serves a dual purpose:

Firstly, it opens the way to enlargement. The Union's institutions and system of decision-making are now sufficiently robust and effective to accommodate the applicant countries seeking to join our area of peace, prosperity and solidarity.

Secondly, it increases general awareness of the need to organise a broad debate on the future of the European Union, requiring the involvement of everyone in all sectors of society, in order to give a boost to and complete the great project of European union.

Europe has long ceased to be just a joining together of States, and is now a people's Europe. However, the juxtaposition of nationalist leanings, too often in evidence, has clouded the vision which is necessary for European integration.

Opinion polls show us that Europe's citizens believe more and more in common actions, decided within a political European Union. Europe's citizens on the whole demand more, not less, of Europe.

Although perceiving Europe as a necessary force, its citizens also see it as increasingly opaque and incomprehensible. They mistrust "Brussels", considering it to be remote and out of touch. It is imperative that the trust of the general public be regained in order to share in the construction of the European project.

The Declaration on the Future of the European Union, adopted in Nice, will open a wide-ranging public debate on matters of an institutional nature. These topics, while undoubtedly important, cannot be discussed in the abstract. They are meaningful only if viewed in the context of a **coherent and sustainable model for our enlarged Union**.

This is what we are really talking about: the need for substantive public debate on **our expectations of, and wishes for, Europe**. Such a debate can no longer be put off.

In the discussions which will now take place, we must consider key questions on the direction in which Europe is headed, such as:

- Do we want a Europe capable of making itself heard on the international political stage? That is to say, an **entity** which is not just economic and commercial, but also **political**?
- Are we all aware and convinced of the **added value of the European Union** for our own countries, which, in isolation, would find it much harder to affirm their existence and identity in the world?-
- How far are we prepared to go in demonstrating **social and economic solidarity** with one another? Not just to avoid monetary crises or the risk of internal market fragmentation, but because we believe that our peoples must help each other and work together in a common cause.
- Are we also **united** in respect of **internal security**? In respect of **external security**?
- What **environment** will we leave to future generations?
- Finally, what are the most effective means whereby the people of Europe can protect and affirm their shared values of **democracy**, solidarity and justice?

We have to ask ourselves this: **To what extent do we want to live and act together?** The responses to the fundamental questions will help us to address the institutional issues with a clear overall vision and give the Union the institutions it requires.

I therefore invite every citizen to take part in this debate, especially through this new Internet site, dealing with the institutional issues at stake and also, or rather first and foremost, looking at the key aspects determining the future purpose of the European Union.

The Commission intends to play an active role in this debate, and will be receptive to the ideas developed in the course of discussions. In due course, it will make specific proposals aimed at giving shape to this project which is of concern to us all, in terms of the overall impact, sustainability and coherence.

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/futurum/documents/speech/sp070301_4_en.htm