

## **THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION**

The fifteen EU heads of state and government, meeting in December 2000 in Nice, expressed the wish for a broad and deeper debate on the future of the European Union. One year later, the European Council passed the Laeken Declaration of 15 December 2001 on the future of the European Union, agreeing to call into being a European Convention.

For more than half a century the countries in the European Union have been living in peace. They strive together for democracy, stability and growth.

The citizens of the Union enjoy unrestricted freedom of travel and settlement and establishment. The rule of law is established. The European Union is one of the three most prosperous regions of the earth; trade relations are no longer subject to any restrictions; the euro is a reality.

The essential thing today is to face new challenges that will perforce spur the European Union to review its role, to improve its functioning, and to seek new avenues of further development.

### **Europe and the World**

In a world marked both by globalization and fragmentation, it is up to Europe to shoulder its responsibilities. The Laeken Declaration calls this to mind.

Europe must undertake the role of a power acting against violence, terror and fanaticism – aware of the world's injustices and acting accordingly.

Europe aims to give to globalization a framework by fostering international cooperation, following ethical principles that are rooted in solidarity and in sustained development.

Europe can measure up to this standard on the international level only by creating mechanisms permitting it to respond in unison, vis-à-vis the world, to the challenges facing it.

What mechanisms? It is the Convention's task to frame such mechanisms and to make proposals.

### **The expectations of the people**

The citizens of Europe support the Union's major goals but do not always see the connection between them and the Union's day-to-day action. What they expect of the Union is less unwieldiness and rigidity, and above all more openness and transparency.

As stressed in the Laeken Declaration, many Europeans feel that the Union should address their concrete concerns rather than "meddling in everything" on all levels. They want decisions affecting them to be better monitored.

Yet the Europeans want not only more transparency, more respect, more efficiency and clarity; they also want "more Europe".

For them, the "gut issues" are: law and safety, fighting crime and containing the flow of migration. They also expect solutions in the sectors of employment, combating poverty, social exclusion, and regarding economic and social cohesion.

They hope for a common approach on environmental pollution, climate changes, and food safety.

The also desire "more Europe" in foreign and security and defence policy.

In short, Europe's citizens count on the European Union in regard to all these important problems, which they feel must be addressed mutually.

In framing their expectations, Europeans pose their representatives and those bearing political responsibility with a seeming paradox: They want a Europe plain and clear, a Europe that respects everyone's sphere of competence – but at the same time a Europe that is active in more and more fields.

It is with this background in mind that the European Convention is called upon to find new answers and approaches.

### **The enlargement of the European Union**

Fifty years after its inception, the Union now stands at a crossroads, a pivotal point of its history: it will soon take in ten new members.

One of the darkest chapters of the history of the European continent will then be forever closed. That moment must also be the birth of a cohesive entity, the members of which share common values, goals, projects, rules and institutions.

To be sure, this transformation into a Europe of 25 member-states will necessitate a different design from that which was adopted fifty years ago when six countries launched the process of European unification. In his speech at the opening of the European Convention, the Convention Chairman, Giscard d'Estaing, pointed to this problem, suggesting that deficient adaptability affected "Europe in its present configuration" and that the shortcomings "will be even more critical in an enlarged Europe".

But what design?

Europe is changing, and in consequence the European Union – its way of functioning, its rules and even its role – must develop further.

It is precisely this ability to change that has for fifty years been the base underlying the work of building Europe; and the European Convention today faces the task of making proposals for an adjustment and a renewal of Europe's institutional and political framework.

In so doing, the Convention must propose clear, consensus-based answers to fundamental questions, including the following:

How should areas of competence be shared between the Union and the member states?

How can the respective tasks of the European institutions be better defined?

How can the cohesion and efficiency of the Union's foreign policy action be ensured?

How can the Union's legitimation be enhanced?

**After concluding its work in the course of 2003, the Convention will present a draft constitution to the European Council, formed by the heads of state and government of the Union's member states meeting regularly together. The Council will convene an Intergovernmental Conference, which will undertake consultations on the proposed draft.**

## **Composition of the Convention**

The European Council has appointed Valéry Giscard d'Estaing Convention Chairman and Giuliano Amato and Jean Luc Dehaene Vice Chairmen.

The Convention's constituent members are the principals engaged in the debate on the future of the Union. In addition to its Chairman and two Vice Chairmen, the Convention comprises:

- » 15 representatives of the heads of state or government of the member states (1 per member state)
- » 13 representatives of the heads of state or government of the candidate states (1 per candidate state)
- » 30 representatives of the national parliaments of the member states (2 per member state)
- » 26 representatives of the national parliaments of the candidate states (2 per candidate state)
- » 16 representatives from the ranks of the members of the European Parliament
- » 2 representatives of the European Commission.

There are alternates for each member of the Convention.

The Economic and Social Committee (three representatives), the Committee of the Regions (six representatives), the "social partners" i.e. labour and management (three representatives), and the European Ombudsman are invited as observers.

The Laeken Declaration provides that the candidate states shall fully participate in the consultations, without however being able to block any consensus emerging among the member states.

## **The plenary sessions**

The Convention meets monthly in plenary session in the European Parliament building in Brussels.

The sessions are open to the public and take place over two half-days.

## **The working groups**

The members of the Convention have participated in working groups in which particular issues were studied more closely.

## **The Presidium**

The Presidium gives impetus to the consultations of the Convention.

The Convention Presidium consists of the Chairman of the Convention, the Vice Chairmen, the two representatives of the members of the European Parliament, the two representatives of the Commission, two national parliament representatives, and representatives of the Spanish, Danish and Greek governments (the governments of the countries presiding over the European Union during the Convention).

The Presidium invites to all its meetings one member of the Convention designated by the representatives of the candidate countries.

## **The public**

The consultations of the European Convention are public; information on its activities is broad; all its documents are made available virtually immediately on the Internet. In terms of the transparency and openness of a political process, therefore, the Convention constitutes a "premiere" (<http://european-convention.eu.int>).