

## Second meeting of the European Convention on the Future of Europe

This is a short report on the second meeting of the Convention on the Future of Europe. During Thursday's meeting the agenda focused on a general debate on broader questions – in particular on the question of 'what do people want from Europe?' During Friday's meeting the Convention's rules of procedure were discussed.<sup>1</sup>

### **First Session – Thursday 21 March 2002**

#### Introduction

The Convention's atmosphere could be described as one of willingness by the delegates to work together, yet also a common sense of frustration at the slow pace in which these first two sessions had been taken. The beginning of the Convention would have to be a sort of listening phase, in order to establish the general feel of the members of the Convention. This was confirmed by Mr. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the President of the Convention, during his introduction speech on Thursday. "The citizens' feelings have not been taken into account", he said. "We first need to listen to them, to each other, and to you [the members of the Convention]." He continued to outline the Convention's leading questions: What is Europe's number one priority? Is the Convention necessary at all? Should Europe become more or less uniform over the next 25 years (*uniform* in the best sense of the word)? And should Europe be acting directly or through recommendations to the member states? He spoke in English, French and German, not to, as he put it, show off his language skills, but to show that in order to unify Europe "we have to be able to come out of ourselves". During his speech Mr. Giscard also said that throughout the Convention there should be a complete freedom of expression for the members, and that the only constraint should be one of time. This limit ended up being one of three minutes per speaker, with a stop-clock overshadowing the room, showing the remaining time each speaker had. And in general this time limit was kept by most of the members.

#### Speakers

The speakers during the sessions on Thursday and Friday included:<sup>2</sup>

<b>National Parliaments</b>	<b>National Governments</b>	<b>MEPs</b>	<b>Commission</b>
Slovenia	Belgium	Germany	Mr. António Vitorino
France	Cyprus	Italy	
Germany	Ireland	UK	
Spain	Italy	France	
Greece	Turkey		
Ireland	UK		
Czech Republic			
Belgium			

<sup>1</sup> You can find a note on the Convention's plenary meeting on 21 and 22 March, made by the General Secretariat of the Convention, under <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/02/cv00/00014en2.pdf>.

The Convention's homepage also offers speeches, agendas, etc.: <http://european-convention.eu.int>.

The plenary sessions of the Convention are also being broadcasted live. And it is possible to follow the plenary sessions online via <http://europarl.telemak.com>.

<sup>2</sup> Based on attendance for about two hours during the Thursday session and two hours during the Friday session.

There seemed to be a general consensus on the need for more democracy and a closer link between the Union and its (estranged) citizens.

- Silvia Kaufmann MEP said that Europe has to be part of everyday life, and that it should be a ‘social and employment Europe’ anchored in a constitution, as is the case in France.
- The Belgian government’s representative said that the risk of nationalism was visible from history, and that the low voter turnout in recent European elections and the growing Euro-skepticism were clear signs that the EU had to start listening to its citizens and to face their interests.
- Erwin Teufel from the German national parliament said that the EU had to be ‘turned on its head’. It has to be built from the bottom up, thus keeping the European level in mind, but never without forgetting the foundation on which it rests, as it is here, in the individual member states and regions, where the everyday life of the European citizens takes place.

Other issues raised included the call for more efficiency and effectiveness of the European institutions, more clearly defined powers between the Union and member states, and between the individual EU institutions themselves, the fight against crime, unemployment and poverty (inside and outside of the EU), and for a better environment.

- The representative of the government of Cyprus said that despite the fact that the EU had brought many benefits, it had not made itself known enough, and that its legitimacy among its citizens depended on the reliance on subsidiarity and proportionality on the one hand, and efficiency and effectiveness on the other hand.

On the question of the EU’s powers and competencies views were more divided.

- Andrew Duff, the EP’s representative, for example said that the ‘federal question’ and the question of “qui fait quoi et comment” should not be avoided, and that his goal and that of his liberal colleagues was one of strengthening the EU in order for it to act more effectively.
- Mr. Gianfranco Fini, the Italian government representative, said that there was now a problem of combining a strong sense of belonging to Europe with a strong sense of national identity among the peoples of Europe. He further said that “the EU will not be a super-state, maybe not even a state” (quoting Commission President Prodi) and that “the EU should not be something to replace the old states” (quoting Jacques Chirac’s speech at the German Bundestag). He admitted however that globalisation did make integration necessary.

Altogether there seemed to be a consensus on the necessity of (at least some form of) integration in Europe, but also a strong call for the protection of the different individual national cultures, which were seen by most as the EU’s true wealth, and for the protection of pluralism and the individual through clearly defined powers and a strong reliance on the principle of subsidiarity in the Union.

## **Second Session – Friday 22 March 2002**

### ROPs and the role of the candidate countries

The second session on Friday saw a debate on the Rules of Procedures (ROPs) for the coming meetings of the Convention. Especially discussed were the role, influence and equality of the candidate countries in the Convention. The lack of translators was interpreted by some as one of the Convention's weaknesses. One of the Danish representatives argued that since most of these languages would be part of the EU's official languages by 2004 they might as well be in use already now. Others argued that the Laeken declaration stated that the Convention should be held in the EU's (current) official languages, and that the applicant countries were already enjoying more equality with the member states than ever existed before. President Giscard called for the debate "not to get too hot on this issue", but instead to focus on pragmatism. To calls for more representation of the candidates in the Praesidium he responded by stating that the problem of lacking representation was the same for candidates as for current members.

### ROPs and the question of alternate members of the Convention

The Praesidium had been given 347 amendments to the drafted ROPs by the Convention members. There was some debate on the question of flexibility with the ROPs. Giscard concluded that although the rules should be interpreted generously, it was nevertheless necessary that they are accepted and adhered to by everybody in the Convention. On the question of alternates to the full members of the Convention he said that nobody would be forced to be present at the meetings, but that the idea behind the Convention was for them to listen to each other. The members were therefore asked to rely on alternates only in case of an emergency so that the spirit of the Convention would not be lost.

### The Secretariat and Working Groups

Concerning the secretariat and working groups Giscard also argued for a pragmatic approach. The secretariat was too small in size and too technical in nature to represent the Convention properly, and that the selection procedure had been based on technical qualifications with only one other criteria, that of gender equality. As for the composition of the working groups, they should not replace the Convention, but instead reflect the spirit of the Convention. All in all he concluded that there was now a significant agreement on the ROPs and that the Convention was therefore now operational.

### Youth Convention

President Giscard also mentioned the planned Youth Convention which is to be modeled on the current Convention and will have 210 full members. It is to be held in July (either just before or after the meeting of the Convention itself). It was important to hear what Europe's youth had to say.

The next meeting of the Convention is to be held on Monday 15 April, starting at 3pm, and to continue on Tuesday 16 April from 9am.

Marco Incerti & Felix Rullhusen,  
CEPS – 22 March 2002.