

DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Some views from Cyprus

As the date of accession approaches, the candidate countries that have been accepted for accession seek to learn more about EU politics and familiarize themselves with the rules of participation in the largest Union in the world. The debate on the future of Europe is of particular interest to them as it also offers them the opportunity to have an input in the formulation of the constitution of the Union. Cyprus fully participates in the debate and although some public discussion has also been taking place, priority is given to the political problem of Cyprus. Cypriots are also concerned about the role EU could play in the solution of the longstanding Cyprus issue.

The main concerns of Cyprus's delegation to the European Convention are related to the deepening of the political integration of the Union. Cypriot delegates have shown their preference for a stronger and more effective Union believing that a strong and dynamic Union would be able to play a major role in the international system.

The main points of Cypriot proposals tabled at the Future of Europe debate are the following:

First, Cyprus believes that the Union should become more democratic. The elimination of the so-called democratic deficit is given high priority. National parliaments should be more involved in the discussion of any new EU legislation. EU regulations and laws would enjoy more legitimacy if they are enacted by the directly elected representatives of the people of Europe. To that end, the European Parliament should have more effective participation in the decision-making and lawmaking procedures of the Union.

Second, Cyprus believes that the Union should develop an effective common foreign and security policy, which would serve the common interests and values of EU member states. Since the EU has become a major economic power, it needs to develop the capability to act as a global power for peace, cooperation and prosperity. The EU should have a more effective role in the prevention and/or management of post-cold war crises in Europe and in the rest of the world. Diplomatic initiatives should be accompanied by an efficient peacemaking and peacekeeping capability.

Third, certain reforms to the European Court of Justice and Europol need to be adopted. European citizens should enjoy the right of free movement, safe conditions of life and a simple cohesive judicial system serving justice all over the Union. The EU in cooperation and collaboration with its member states should be able to deal with organized crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration readily and effectively.

Fourth, since Cyprus enjoys high standards in employment and social cohesion, it would like to see the EU achieving higher employment and more cohesion in the social sphere. Cyprus has a strong economy, and since it satisfies the Maastricht standards it looks forward to participation in the Eurozone by 2006. The EU's economic and monetary project (EMU) should be stabilized and made to operate in favour of all member states.

Last but not least, Cyprus is strongly in favour of the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the constitution of the Union. The protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms should become an integral part of the *acquis*. EU citizens should be able to enjoy their rights and freedoms without restraints and the Union should work to that end.

Cyprus is optimistic about the future of the EU. Many Cypriots believe that the Union should follow the route of deeper integration, the final step of that route

being the federalisation of Europe. Its strong support for deep political integration is based partly on its perception about the benefits that it will gain from its own participation in the Union. Being a small country, it assumes that its independence could be guaranteed by membership of the EU. It believes that the EU's ongoing process of integration will one day lead to the EU becoming a zone of security and peace. Cyprus would expect that any solution of its political problem would be based on the principles common to all member states of the Union as these are enshrined in Article 6 of the Treaty of the European Union.

Discussion on the future of Europe in the public arena has taken the form of articles in the press, broadcasts on radio and television and public discussions and seminars.

The Research and Development Center – Intercollege has organized two seminars under the title the Future of Europe in cooperation with the European Institute of Cyprus and the European Policy Institutes Network. These seminars have attracted participants from different working sectors, both Cypriots and non-Cypriots, as well as persons from the media. The discussion and the comments at the end of the seminars confirmed the willingness of the people of Cyprus to participate in the debate about the future of the European Union.