

EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF ROMANIA



National Debates on the Future of Europe

The enlargement that the European Union is facing nowadays is the biggest in its history (taking into consideration that 10 candidate countries are expected to join in 2004 and other 2 in 2007) and that is why the process should be approached most carefully.

The Romanian authorities are engaged in a dialogue with civil society, the academic environment, “think tanks”, NGOs, local communities and youth with the aim of finding the answers to the questions addressed by the “Convention for the Future of Europe”. This dialogue takes place not only through the means of a national secretariat (shaped according to the model of the inter-institutional Secretariat of the European Convention) but also through public debates, seminars and conferences, mass-media and an interactive website.

In March 2001, the Commission for European Integration, along with the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies elaborated a draft regarding the organization of national debates, establishing the schedule, the topics and the framework of these debates.

Romanians are interested in the future architecture of the European Union, which their country will join in the next few years. The citizens’ ideas, proposals and comments were collected and published by the Ministry of European Integration in the brochure “*Romanian citizens’ vision regarding the Future of Europe*” (their points of view were collected by means of more than 5,000 questionnaires distributed in all the counties of Romania). On its website (www.mie.ro), the Ministry of European Integration devoted a special section to the Convention regarding the Future of Europe, available both in Romanian and English.

From February 2002, a further stage of the debates has been initiated in order to obtain more detailed and substantial answers to the questions regarding the Future of Europe.

The main topics of the debates organized at the central and local level are:

- European governance;
- Delimitation of competences between the Member States and the Union;
- Economic and Monetary Union;
- The role of national Parliaments;
- NGOs' role in the European architecture;
- The status of the "Charter of Fundamental Rights";
- Romania's role in the European Union and the Future of the EU.
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These national debates raised awareness among various circles of society: academic, business, NGOs, trade unions, youth organizations, etc. The majority of these debates were organized through cooperation between the Ministry of European Integration, Romanian Parliament, European Institute of Romania and NGOs. The European Institute of Romania organized debates both with well-known experts from Member States and from candidate countries and with local experts.

The conclusions of these national debates were the following:

- The debates focused to some extent on the general philosophy of the European Union rather than on technical aspects. The Romanian society is enthusiastic about European integration and considers it an opportunity for the emancipation of the country both economically and socially.
- In the context of globalisation, Europe represents a solution for the problems of the nation states that can exercise their sovereignty only at a higher level, while respect of national integrity.
- The necessity to increase the efficiency of the decision-making process requires a well-established European security, based on a strong EU border

police, the consolidation of the defence dimension of the foreign policy as well as a Community “multilateral diplomacy”.

- The involvement of the national Parliaments and the European Parliament represents the necessary key for giving more legitimacy to the European project and for reducing the democratic deficit.
- Citizens want Europe to have a special role in international relations and to be an active actor in the shaping of global defence systems.
- The Future of the European Union should be built on principles of solidarity and tolerance.
- The Romanian youth wishes for a Europe with no internal frontiers and without discrimination between East and West.