

## THE BULGARIAN DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

At [http://europa.eu.int/futurum/documents/other/oth010202\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/futurum/documents/other/oth010202_en.pdf) the initial Bulgarian position on the debate on future of Europe can be found. It provides preliminary answers to almost all questions raised in the Laeken declaration. The answers to the EPIN questionnaire provide also a good idea of the already determined Bulgarian views.

In order to be able to predict how the Bulgarian national position might evolve in the months ahead it is however interesting to know the context into which these concrete views fit and the background that has determined their elaboration.

1. From the very launch of the Convention Bulgaria (together with Romania and Turkey) was in a rather special position regardless of the formally equal status all the thirteen candidate countries have in the Convention. The reason was the already clear timetable for the accession of the 10 other candidate countries to the European Union – namely 2004 - and the uncertainty about the accession date for Bulgaria and Romania, and in the case of Turkey even about the date for launching negotiations.

Because of this, both public opinion and the politicians and experts in Bulgaria were and are still concerned about Bulgaria's future in the European Union rather than about the future of the European Union itself.

Meanwhile the Copenhagen Council has made the difference between the ten, on the one hand, and Bulgaria and Romania, on the other hand and Turkey, on the third hand more explicit. The ten 'will participate fully' in the IGC and the new Treaty will be signed after their accession. (Regardless of this the ten insist to be treated on an equal footing with Member states already in the framework of the Convention.) Bulgaria and Romania will participate as observers in the next IGC. Finally, the Copenhagen Council says nothing about Turkey's participation in this IGC.

Any elements in the new Treaty and of the following ratification procedure that might imply changes in the conditions under which the negotiations with Bulgaria were launched or postponing the target date of 2007 will be strongly controversial for Bulgaria.

Just one example to illustrate Bulgarian Convention-related concerns about the conditions and the target date for accession: a full incorporation of the Charter on Fundamental Rights into the New Treaty might imply toughening/quantifying of the Copenhagen economic criteria and thus delaying Bulgaria's accession to the EU (a concern voiced by the Bulgarian member of the Convention Nikolay Mladenov).

Since Bulgaria has not concluded negotiations yet it is in a different position to voice its views in the Convention as strongly as the 10 countries that have already concluded negotiations. The unfortunate coincidence in time of the negotiations and of the discussions in the Convention presents Member states with the strong temptation to try to win over candidate countries for their own positions in a kind of a hidden bargaining and for candidate countries to be susceptible to such attempts in order not to hamper the negotiations. The more the Convention is turning into an IGC the stronger this trend becomes. Copenhagen has put an end to this linkage for the 10 accession countries but

not for Bulgaria and Romania. So, some developments of Bulgarian or Romanian positions in the Convention will remain unpredictable to the extent they might be provoked by the wish not to confront present member states rather than by purely national considerations.

The rather optimistic view on the timetable for the conclusion of the next IGC (end 2003) has provoked in Copenhagen the exclusion of Bulgaria from the next IGC (provided the IGC would be postponed, Bulgaria still has a realistic chance to conclude negotiations in early 2004 which could raise the question why it should have a different status from the 10 countries which concluded negotiations in Copenhagen). But the timing of the IGC has some domestic impact on the Bulgarian debate on the necessity and time framework for changes in the Bulgarian constitutions. Whereas a lot of MPs are favouring such changes as soon as possible, the Bulgarian president Mr. Parvonov is advocating not rushing into the process because of the pending IGC. Should this argument be adopted as a valid one, a delay of the conclusion of the IGC will have indirectly a negative effect on the Bulgarian reform process because some changes in the Bulgarian constitution are considered as essential at least for the reform of the judiciary.

2. The Bulgarian initial position on the Convention is very strongly in favour of the communitarian method. The reasons for this are twofold: On the one hand, Bulgaria is a rather small country and it is quite natural that it adopts a position which is typical for present small and medium size member states. On the other hand, as an associated and a candidate country Bulgaria has gained most of its experience with EU institutions with the Commission and with the European Parliament. On two issues that have been on the top of the EU-Bulgaria agenda – the visa issue and the Kozlodju issue – Bulgaria has had with the Commission and with the European Parliament a more positive experience than with the Council. Thus, Bulgaria has rather convincing proof that the communitarian method is working to its benefit and a sometimes rather frustrating experience as regards the benefits of the intergovernmental method. Going back to history, Bulgaria has further strong reasons to be in favour of an European Union a la Monet rather than an European Union a la Metternich.

Several Bulgarian NGOs are following the Convention and organizing discussions, workshops and conferences on Convention related topics: the European Institute, the Institute for European Studies and Information at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Centre for Liberal Strategies, the Association of graduates of the Bruges College, the Bulgarian Association of EC research. Participants in these conferences include both Convention members (Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian ones – Minister Kuneva, MPs Valchev, Mladenov, Abadjiev, Jean-Luc Dehaene, Prof.Dr.Jürgen Meyer, Mrs Gisela Stuart) and experts. Articles on the Convention have been published in the Bulletin Europe (issued by the Bulgarian Association of EU research) and by the weekly newspaper Capital. The daily newspapers have however hardly reported about the Convention in substance.

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