
HEARING FROM EUROPE

THE ONLY EU-WIDE PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

HIGHLIGHTS DEBATES

23-27 JUNE 2003

DEBATE I

NEW CONSTITUTION GETS GENERAL THUMBS-UP

“We want a Europe that is simpler, where everyone knows who does what and everything is democratic,” said Valéry Giscard d’Estaing in a video interview. Speaking just days after his draft European Union Constitution was accepted at the Thessaloniki European Council, the man who headed the European Convention probably had every reason to be pleased with the outcome of his 18 months of work. He said it was now for EU governments to take things forward and hoped that the draft Constitution would meet the demand of Europe’s citizens.

Kickstarting the first debate in a series of seven, **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe*, explained why the *Hearing from Europe* week was put together. “The latest Eurobarometer poll shows that 60% of people in the European Union don’t know what the Convention is really about,” he said. “So we decided to ask the public what they thought about Europe and to get different member states asking each other questions.”

The Thessaloniki gathering was a historic moment for Europe, thought European Commissioner **António Vitorino** in charge of Justice and Home Affairs and VIP in this evening debate. “It showed that the Convention had succeeded and was not just a talk show as some people had previously thought.” He felt it would simplify European treaties, clarify decision-making and reinforce democratic accountability.

Speaking from Dublin, a panel of three distinguished guests expressed mixed views on the draft Constitution. Former Irish prime minister **Garrett FitzGerald** praised the way the document “protected Europe’s distinctive values,” among them human rights. He also felt it would extend essentially European concepts such as peace, development aid and ecology. But **Turlough O’Sullivan**, General Director, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), felt the Convention had not addressed Europe’s social dimension or the gap – perceived or real – between EU leaders and citizens. He also disliked the lack of emphasis on making the EU “business-friendly”. **Tony Brown**, former Director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), was happy that national parliaments would have a prominent role, allowing them to debate the EU’s long-term plans.

Indeed, replied the EU Commissioner, there was no longer any reason for national parliaments to feel marginalised.

The Polish guests, linked by satellite from Warsaw, focused on the effectiveness of the EU. The Convention’s proposal for a dual presidency (of the European Council and the European Commission) did not worry **Danuta Hübner**, Minister of European Affairs. She wanted to see them working as a team, but wanted a clearer job description for ‘Mr Europe’, the new president of the European Council. Nor was she pleased to see a proposed reweighting of votes at the Council of Ministers, which would reduce Polish influence on EU decisions. **Henryka Bochniarz**, President of the Association of Private Employers, expressed concern that EU membership would add additional layers of government and impose a burdensome flat-tax rate on Poland. **Aleksander Smolar**, President, Stefan Batory Foundation, admitted he was not happy that the draft Constitution contained no references to Christianity and its historic importance for Europe.

The panellists from Lisbon also had mixed opinions on the draft Constitution. **Vitor Martin**, Senior Consultant, Citigroup and Former State Secretary for European Affairs, said he was disappointed in the general lack of vision, although he liked the upgrading of the EU's political dimension. He called for the creation of more "trust", something not achieved by the current draft. **Alvaros de Vasconcelos**, Director of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies, acknowledged progress in reinforcing defence cooperation, but felt there was not enough institutional reform on the cards. **Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins**, MP and Member of the European Convention, recommended that citizens be invited to read the new Constitution.

Commissioner Vitorino responded by highlighting the abolition of the EU's pillar structure and the ability soon for the EU to make a bigger impact on the world arena, thanks to the Convention's various proposed reforms.

He tried to calm fears that the big countries – six in the future EU25 – would dominate the small countries. "We have tried to find a balance," he said. Moreover, national parliaments for the first time would be able to flag their disagreement with the European Commission via the proposed early-warning system. As for the reforms to the Commission itself, he said he hoped the next Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) would give all Commissioners the right to vote.

Could the Convention package unravel at the next IGC? Giles Merritt's question underscored the potential for national governments to undo much of the good work done to date. Things could unravel, answered Commissioner Vitorino, but governments will probably avoid unpicking too many articles, for fear of total collapse of the Constitution. A Lisbon panellist warned, however, that changes could be expected in areas such as the Commission's composition, subsidiarity, enhanced cooperation and the leaving-the-EU article.

DEBATE II

ACCESSION COUNTRIES READY TO "JUMP ABOARD"

If Europe was a ship, some would say it was steaming ahead too fast. Others believe it is going too slowly and remains somewhat rudderless. Perhaps the key question, however, concerns its 'passengers'. Are they happy with their crew, the captain and their somewhat vague destination?

As one would expect in a debate involving participants from two European Member States (Greece and The Netherlands), one accession country (Hungary) and one hopeful candidate (Romania), opinions diverged on a number of points. Yet the second of seven debates, in the *Hearing from Europe* series, was remarkable for underlining a broad consensus that the European Union is taking the right steps forward.

The EU's new draft Constitution, recently approved at the Thessaloniki summit in Greece, received mixed reviews. Most participants called it a "good start", a platform for the future. "It has tried to find a political expression of equality among unequal partners," said **Péter Balázs**, Hungary's Ambassador to the EU and Former State Secretary for European Integration and External Economic Relations. "We believe it's a pretty good solution, although it will need fine-tuning at the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in October."

Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament and VIP speaker in Brussels, hailed the draft Constitution as “exciting, innovative, coherent and balanced.” He was sure public acceptance of the draft would follow eventually.

Speaking live thanks to a satellite link from Romania, **Renate Weber**, President of The Open Society Foundation, said the draft rightly increased the role of national parliaments in the EU’s decision-making process. This would help to address the democratic deficit, added her colleague, **Hildegard Puwak**, Minister for European Integration.

Some aspects of the Convention’s early thinking had worried the Netherlands, admitted **Atzo Nicolai**, State Secretary for European Affairs. He called ‘Mr. Europe’, the proposed President for the European Council, a “compromise, but acceptable.” His Hungarian colleague, Péter Balázs, said it would be all right to have a “symbolic” chair for the European Council, but he warned against putting that chair in competition with the European Commission President.

Challenges aplenty still lie ahead of Europe. It needs to address issues such as economic governance and “undertaxation”, thought **Panayotis Thomopoulos**, Deputy Governor of the Bank of Greece. Security too, whether internal or external, should continue to focus the minds of Europe’s leaders, added **Monica den Boer**, Managing Director of the Institute for European Law Enforcement Administration (EULEC). But she praised the way the EU was giving priority attention to issues such as immigration.

The debate naturally turned to the accession countries. Hungarian participants said their nation was ready to take its place in the EU, thanks to pre-accession participation in various programmes. Romania too was preparing for the day it would become a candidate by adapting its national constitution to fit the one being laid out for the EU. Citizens of both these countries were generally positive about the EU, although more awareness-raising would be necessary in future. A point that was reiterated by **George Verberg**, CEO of Nederlandse Gasunie, who said all EU Member States should educate their citizens about the European project.

Greater prosperity through EU membership was, of course, on the minds of the people of Romania and Hungary. “They will want to see benefits within three years,” said **Andras Inotai**, General Director of the Institute for World Economics at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. But there was agreement that the new members would also have much to offer the EU – including new markets and know-how. “Europe’s most dynamic trade will soon be between its new members,” added Inotai.

The Hungarian and Romanian participants promised that their nations would use EU funds wisely and one day pay back the credits they received. “We will give as well as take,” said **Peter Simon**, President of ABB Romania and the German Industry Association in Romania (DWR).

Talk of big EU countries dominating the small ones occupied centre stage for a while. Participants from Hungary and Romania acknowledged they had some fears this could happen. But most agreed that the draft Constitution appeared to want to prevent this from happening. In any case, added **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe*, “Even the big countries are divided amongst themselves on many issues, such as taxation and foreign policy.” The main issue facing the EU has nothing to do with the size of countries and everything to do with improving competitiveness, said **Istvan Fodor**, Chairman of Ericsson Hungary and Chairman of the Hungarian-EU Enlargement Business Council.

As the debate drew to a close, there was talk of whether the EU was still thinking in 20th-century ways. Was it not still more interested in its institutions than its people and

policies? Where is the vision that the Union so desperately needs? The question remained unanswered.

Wrapping up the event, Merritt said the debate had clarified two things for him. “The Convention has tried to streamline regulations that stretch back some 45 years, but is faced with dealing with many inconsistencies.” As for the next IGC in October, it was now his opinion that there was little agreement on its importance: “Some say it will be for fine-tuning the draft Constitution; others hint at more radical tinkering.”

DEBATE III

CONSTITUTION IS NOW RIPE FOR “POLISHING”

We now have a good draft Constitution but it could be better. That was the view of the majority of participants in the third debate in a series of seven, held under the banner of the *Hearing from Europe* week organised by *Friends of Europe*. Four very different countries – Bulgaria, Finland, Germany and Malta – took part in the event, linked by live satellite with the Brussels host venue.

Incorporation in the draft text of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, for instance, was greeted as a move to create a Europe that is more based on values. “The draft text also highlights the importance of freedom, security and justice,” said **Rumyana Kolarova**, Jean Monnet Professor at Sofia State University, “concepts to which, for historical reasons, Eastern European countries attach great importance.”

Other pending improvements were popular – among them enhanced transparency in EU institutions, the recognition of civil society and the extension of qualified majority voting. Maltese participant **Juanito Camilleri**, CEO of GO Mobile, even dared to call the draft document a “good read”. **Pascal Lamy**, European Commissioner for Trade and VIP speaker in Brussels, emphasised that this was the first time the EU has drafted something “with the citizen in mind”. He said it clearly explained why Europe was building itself a future.

But doubts soon surfaced. One Bulgarian speaker believed that a ‘Mr Europe’, the proposed chair of the European Council, would enhance the EU’s visibility on the world stage. However one of her German colleagues expressed concern that Mr Europe’s powers might clash with those of the new EU Foreign Minister and the European Commission President. Likewise, how could a system of voting and non-voting Commissioners be called fair? Maltese participants were opposed to the idea of reducing the number of European Parliament Members for each Member State from five to four.

Other speakers bemoaned the lack of a common foreign and security policy, as well as the EU’s continuing democratic deficit. More worryingly, comments indicated that some of the larger Member States would still like to create a “core Europe” or “clusters within clusters”. What Europe needs now, remarked several speakers, is for people to muster enough courage and goodwill to push the EU’s ambitious project through to completion.

The Intergovernmental Conference that begins in October will be a chance to “polish” the draft text, said **Roderick Pace**, President of the European Movement in Malta. There is indeed still time to “renegotiate” the Constitution thought **Jari Vilén**, a Finnish MP and former Minister of Foreign Trade: “Everything is open to discussion until governments

have agreed it.” Moreover, added one of his colleagues, the Constitution will be valid for no longer than five years – much shorter than the half-century that some people suggest.

Reservations were also expressed by some of the German participants. Not least the need for a better definition of the powers of ‘Mr Europe’. Looking at the potential impact of the draft Constitution on his own parliament, **Christian Meissner**, a Member of the European Committee of the Bavarian Parliament, did not want harmonisation to apply to every political field. “We can only get people’s trust if we enforce subsidiarity at all levels and at all times,” he said. A speaker from Malta reiterated these fears, underlining concern among his compatriots about their own parliament’s future sovereignty.

Turning to the subject of enlargement, several speakers emphasised how they thought it was a more important issue for their countries than the work of the Convention. For the admission of the accession countries is already obliging EU Member States to rethink their own economic policies.

Estonia is a good example, successfully attracting many new foreign investors. Finland would like to have these investors for itself, but cannot compete with its neighbour’s substantially lower tax rate. Germany, Austria and other Member States sharing borders with accession countries find themselves in the same relatively uncompetitive position as Finland. “These newcomers are underlining the inherent inflexibility of our economic policies and labour markets,” said **Thomas Hueck**, Chief Economist with HypoVereinsbank.

The accession countries are also having to change their way of thinking. Malta, remarked one of its participants, now needs to view itself as a border economy rather than a small-island economy. “But I hope EU membership will not hamper our dynamism, something that goes hand in hand with being a small and very adaptable island,” said **Juanito Camilleri**.

Giles Merritt, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe*, concluded by saying how struck he was by the participants’ consensus on Europe: “They all seem to agree that it stands for physical security, economic wellbeing and a sense of identity in a rapidly expanding world.”

DEBATE IV

WIDER OR DEEPER? EUROPE’S NEVER-ENDING DEBATE

Four very diverse countries – Austria, Cyprus, Lithuania and the United Kingdom – took part in the fourth debate in the *Hearing from Europe* series, organised by *Friends of Europe*. As in the previous meetings, there was a broad consensus that the European Convention’s new draft Constitutional treaty was laying the foundations for a stronger and more efficient Europe. But some participants were eager to propose improvements, especially to the EU’s future institutional framework.

The European Union has always struggled to find the right balance between deepening and widening itself, argued **Johannes Kyrle**, Secretary General of the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This would continue to be the case. But he foresaw potential conflicts between ‘Mr Europe’, the President of the European Council, and the President of the European Commission. When debate turned to the problem of national identity in an enlarged Europe, **Wolfgang Schmale**, Professor of History at the University of Vienna,

said that 19th-century concepts should be left behind: "Nation states are no longer autonomous, they are part of a network."

Enthusiasm for the draft treaty was evident in the Cyprus camp. The Convention had kept pace with European public opinion and included many parts of the civil society in discussions. Best of all, the draft text contains numerous symbols that are important to Europe's citizens, such as the euro, the European flag, a single legal personality and fundamental rights. "This is nation-building on a new scale," said **Chris Pelagias**, President of the European Movement of Cyprus.

The growing trend to delegate responsibility to Brussels had to be accepted, said **Marcos Kyprianou**, Cyprus's Minister of Finance. But he did not want to see small countries being "smothered by their big brothers." That was why Cyprus was reluctant to abandon the principle of one country, one European Commissioner. He also indicated that Cyprus may want to reopen its budget arrangements with the EU. Addressing the issue of national parliaments having more say in the EU's decisionmaking, **Lefteris Hadjizacharias**, Senior Partner at KPMG, called for greater involvement of regional parliaments.

After congratulating the Convention for its work to date, **Franz Fischler**, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Fishery and VIP Speaker in Brussels, acknowledged that the Convention occasionally seemed to be too secretive and appeared to lack time to complete its work. On a personal note, he would have liked qualified majority voting to have been extended to all areas, especially common foreign and defence policy. But now was the time, he added, for good Europeans to go out and sell the idea of a common future.

Participants speaking from Lithuania underlined that the country had only enjoyed its recent independence for 14 years. So the idea of handing over more power to a single centre, Brussels, brought back unpleasant memories of their former Soviet masters. However, according to **Rytis Martikonis**, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Convention demonstrated that an EU of 25 can work. He also recalled how, contrary to expectations, the accession countries had not ganged up in any way or on any issues during the discussions. The country had no fears about becoming part of the EU's external borders, he added.

Gintaras Morkis, Director of the Department of Foreign Relations and of the Confederation of Lithuanian Industrialists, felt that the timing of the Convention was not ideal, given the current EU enlargement process. But he praised the body for its goals of making the EU simpler, more efficient and less distant from its citizens.

The first speaker for the United Kingdom, **Denis MacShane**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said he believed the EU did need a Constitution and that the Union was making efforts to improve areas where it was not performing well. But he wanted the nation states to be allowed to "work well". The UK's main concern, he added, was the idea of allowing majority voting to be extended to EU foreign policy.

Geoffrey Howe, Chairman of the Framlington Russian Investment Fund and former Chancellor of the Exchequer, agreed that the EU needed a Constitution, while reminding the audience that this was "not the end of the process." He wanted to see a council of national parliaments to consider subsidiarity issues.

Neil O'Brien, Campaign Director for Vote 2004.com, which seeks a UK referendum on the Constitution, said his government would appear to be running away from the draft treaty if no referendum was held.

In the question and answer session, which allowed each country to raise topics with another, Lithuania asked the UK participants what they thought of the new European Foreign Minister. Good idea, said MacShane, but he or she will need to be active and not just a figurehead. He was all for a “common foreign policy”, but not a “single” one. An Austrian participant then suggested that this new minister should be a “spokesman and a networker.”

In answer to an Austrian question about Britain’s attitude to referenda, MacShane added that the Parliament traditionally debated and decided issues for the people. Were offshore refugee camps the best way to solve EU immigration problems? MacShane picked up the question from Cyprus by replying that “the people want the EU, not nations, to solve this problem.”

A question from Lithuania, regarding Austria’s position on common foreign and defence policies, was swiftly answered. “We favour an extension of qualified majority voting to these policies,” said Kyrle. On the potential for Cyprus’s EU accession to encourage Turkey to help solve the Cyprus problem, Kyprianou simply replied “yes”.

Giles Merritt, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe*, could see that the “sheer complexity” of finding a Constitution for a Union of 25 members was evident in almost every intervention. It remained to be seen, he said, whether the draft treaty would be accepted as a “set of compromises” or be unravelled at the next Intergovernmental Conference. He also wondered how anyone could sell the idea of a Constitution to the European public, given that their governments are so unsure of their own positions on it.

DEBATE V

A CONSTITUTION “BORN OUT OF TRUST”

Launching the fifth debate in the *Hearing from Europe* series – which involved the Czech Republic, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden – **Margot Wallström**, European Commissioner for the Environment, underlined the unique nature of the European Convention’s new draft Constitutional treaty. “Historically, most constitutions were born out of conflicts,” she said. “But this one is based on trust and the belief that Europe has a future.” She called for a deepening of the European Union’s democratic roots, adding that the Constitution was just one “milestone” en route to that goal.

The draft treaty was not perfect, she acknowledged, pointing to the lack of clarity about where power lies in the institutions. Yet it did offer a “common vision” for sustainable development, for instance in the marrying of the economic and social aspects of the European project. She would like to see a special sustainable development protocol added to the draft in the next few months. The Commission itself would be submitting some amendments before the next Intergovernmental Conference, concerning shortcomings in the draft’s institutional solution.

The debate moved to the Czech Republic, linked to the Brussels host venue by live satellite. **Lenka Rovna**, Member of the European Convention, underlined how grateful she was to the EU for allowing the accession countries to participate in the Convention’s 16-month deliberation. “But we were sometimes discussing problems that do not apply to us,” she said, adding that her country shared some of the other countries’ view that the Convention was proposing too many changes to Europe’s institutional system. Nor did

the idea of no longer having one Commissioner for each country play well with her fellow citizens, she remarked. However, her two panel colleagues agreed that some reforms were needed in order to have a dynamic and efficient EU.

When the debate moved to Italy, **Boris Biancheri**, President of the Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, attempted to benchmark the Convention's work so far. "Europe now has its symbols, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the basic institutional framework. But it has only been 40% successful in strengthening institutions and making them more accountable and transparent." He added that Europe had made no progress towards integration, before calling on people to "defend" what the Convention had achieved to date.

Looking beyond Europe's borders, **Gianni De Michelis**, Italy's former Foreign Affairs Minister, listed several challenges facing Europe. These include its configuration and global role. He raised the idea of building a "core Europe" within the EU, provided it had sufficient political will of its own. In any case, added his colleague **Mario Deaglio**, former President of Montedison, it was as important for Europe to clarify its position towards the US as to have a Constitution.

Back in Brussels, the debate's overall moderator **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe*, asked Commissioner Wallström if she agreed that the conclusions of the Convention now meant that Member States would be a "lot less autonomous" than before. She disagreed that this would be the case, while arguing that Europe was now in "new territory and had nowhere else in the world with which to compare itself." Yet she was adamant that the principle of unanimity would render decision-making "impossible" in an enlarged Europe. "We are increasingly moving towards intergovernmental cooperation," she said, admitting that this was a compromise.

Recent strong criticism of the Convention by Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, did not reflect the general views of his citizens said **Mario Hirsch**, Chief Editor of the *Letzebuenger Land* and the moderator for the Luxembourg panel. What was so positive about the Convention, argued **Ben Fayot**, MP and Member of the European Convention, was the fact that it brought together national parliamentarians from 28 countries. They could not assemble as often as members of the European Parliament, but they have now established links amongst themselves.

Lucien Thiel, Director of the Luxemburg Banks and Bankers Association, said he was uncomfortable with the fact that Brussels would soon decide most issues by majority voting. He warned that this system allowed groups of countries to overrule others who were sometimes trying to protect their national interests, referring to a recent debate about national tax levels among Member States. He too argued that the Convention was a milestone, part of Europe's continuing evolution.

"I welcome the draft treaty's frequent references to democracy and fundamental rights," said **Jul Christophory**, Chargé de Mission, Luxemburg University Centre and former Head of the European Commission in Luxemburg. He urged people to continue its "useful work".

Speaking from Sweden, **America Vera-Zavala**, Founder of Attac Sweden, wanted to see better economic governance of Europe. She suggested that the Convention should have "democratised" the European Central Bank. There was also some disappointment expressed by **Johnny Munkhammar**, Senior Advisor for European Affairs of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises. He underlined how Europe's economy still lags behind the United States, adding that "we need to do lots more than the draft treaty proposed." He also said that it failed to make clear the limits of the EU's powers and those of governments, which would only increase the existing democratic deficit.

However, his fellow panellist **Lars Danielsson**, State Secretary for European and International Affairs, did think that “some elements” of the treaty – such as on transparency – would improve democracy in Europe.

In the question and answer session, Sweden asked Italy what it thought about having a referendum on the Constitution. De Michelis replied that he was in favour, as did Commissioner Wallström. On the idea of having a ‘Mr Euro’, raised by a Belgian questioner, Luxembourg’s Fayot suggested it might be helpful. To a question from Luxembourg to Sweden on social policy, Vera-Zavala replied that Europe needed a good welfare system, higher salaries for the poor and less unemployment.

Did Luxemburg panellists have any thoughts on a core group of nations working together on defence? To this question from the Czech Republic, Fayot thought that it would only widen rifts within Europe and with the US. But this was an intergovernmental defence initiative, he added, not a Convention one – probably because the Convention had made little progress hammering out a common security and defence policy.

Reflecting on the debate’s various interventions, Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe, concluded that one of the real weaknesses not addressed by the Convention was the nature of European politics: “It lacks a left and right spectrum.” He also wondered if it would be useful for all European Commissioners to first serve a term as a Member of the European Parliament. “Then the President of the Commission would form a sort of government inside the Commission made up of a majority that reflected the number of votes cast for MEPs in the different countries of Europe,” he said. “That would result in a Commissioner whose mandate lasted until it was voted out.”

DEBATE VI

CONVENTION MAY JUST BE ONE IN A SERIES

In his preface to the *Hearing from Europe* series’ sixth debate – which involved Belgium, Estonia, Slovakia, and Spain, **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe* and hub moderator in the Brussels host venue, highlighted several reoccurring topics.

Was the European Convention’s new draft Constitutional Treaty a workable or worthless document? Would ‘Mr Europe’ (the President of the European Council) be a ceremonial or powerful post? Was the public truly engaged in the discussion of the Convention? And would the European Union soon benefit from a streamlined decision-making process?

On the Brussels panel, **Jean-Luc Dehaene**, Vice-President of the European Convention and Trustee of *Friends of Europe*, said that neither the Convention nor the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) would ever meet the needs of every Member State. But of the two, he thought the Convention was “more open and less about national interests.” He praised the Convention for including all the EU’s candidate countries, because this had resulted in a real “consensus”. As for the proposal to have a smaller group of voting European Commissioners from 2009, he said this would ensure that the institution was strong, efficient and able to “represent Europe’s general needs.”

The draft treaty could never be valid for 50 years, remarked **Franklin Dehousse**, Professor at the University of Liège and Director of European Studies at Belgium’s Royal Institute for International Relations (IRRI-KIIB). “The pace of change in Europe is too great and the EU is expanding too quickly for that to be possible,” he said, adding that

future Conventions would likely follow soon. This belief seems common, interjected Merritt, who said that several participants during the week had foreseen “reform happening on a rolling basis.” Dehousse went on to say that he thought the present text lacked anything “positive or manageable” on EU finances and on the revision process itself. Future text revisions would therefore be increasingly difficult.

Etienne Davignon was worried about the future of the European Commission, of which he had been a member in the 1980s. “For the Commission to be powerful it must be seen as the initiator of European policy in those areas where it has authority,” said the Vice-President of the Société Générale de Belgique and President of *Friends of Europe* and the Belgian Royal Institute for International Relations (IRRI-KIIB). If it is not that initiator, Europe gets bogged down in a “permanent negotiating process, as happened in Nice in 1997.” Asked if business would like the Convention, he replied that the draft text offered business-people “some solutions” to their questions.

The debate moved to Estonia, where **Mall Hellam**, Director of the Open Estonia Foundation, congratulated the Convention for including special articles on participatory democracy. But she felt there was little clarity on the consultation process between social partners and European institutions. Business wants “flat bureaucracy”, added her colleague **Peeter Tohver**, Chairman of Falck Eesti. He was unsure if the draft Constitution would offer that to Estonia or the EU. He also acknowledged that his country’s “very open economy” might suffer a little when Estonia joins the EU, but felt that the eventual expansion of market opportunities far outweighed any inconveniences associated with Union membership.

The Convention will make the EU easier to understand, said **Toomas-Hendrik Ilves**, Member of the Estonian Parliament and former Foreign Affairs Minister. He also argued that the draft treaty’s length was not excessive for a 21-century document of this kind. With regard to the weighting system for small and large Member States, he would have preferred a “less complex and more legitimate solution for balancing their needs.” He proposed a bicameral legislature solution, with proportional representation and each country having the same number of votes.

“The Convention has made good progress on simplifying EU procedures and defining the competencies of institutions,” said **Jan Figel**, Member of the Slovakian Parliament and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and also a Member of the European Parliament. Yet he had misgivings about the future for European Commissioners. Would those without a vote be given a portfolio?

Civil society’s future role in the EU was a matter of concern to Slovakian **Zuzana Wienk**, Executive Director of the Alliance for Promotion of Fair Play. She said there would still be a “huge gap between the EU’s leaders and its people” and called for debate to shift away from rather dry academic areas. “Where is the spirit or future vision for Europe?” she wondered. Her fellow panellist **Peter Mihok**, President of the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Member of the Advisory Body of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said European enlargement would bring new dynamism to the EU.

Speaking by satellite link from Spain, **Cristina Gortazar Rotaache**, Professor, Jean Monnet Chair at Pontificia University, said the Spanish government had wanted a clear reference to Christianity in the draft Constitution. But she felt that the absence of such a reference was not a problem, since the Preamble’s emphasis on the rule of law and human rights was more than sufficient for the Union. On immigration, she said the EU needed a global approach and that the European Commission was doing good work in this controversial area.

A common foreign policy is almost non-existent in the EU, said **Guillermo Martínez Casañ**, Member of the Spanish Parliament and Partido Popular Spokesperson for EU Affairs. He recommended that the Union should work more closely with the United States. While praising the Convention's "achievements", he said candidate countries should have been given a greater role in it.

In the question and answer session, Slovakia asked Belgium's Jean-Luc Dehaene for his view on 'Mr Europe'. "The Convention sees the future President of the European Council as a Chair and not a President of Europe," he replied, "although much of the role will depend on his or her personality." A question from Belgium to Slovakia about the European Court of Justice prompted Jan Figel to suggest that the Court would play a major role in "bringing the Convention to life."

Estonia's Toomas-Hendrik Ilves told a Belgian questioner that he thought the European Commission serves small countries particularly well. In answer to an Estonian question on foreign policy, Slovakia's Jan Figel responded that "states" should control it. Belgium's Franklin Dehousse added that the EU must beware allowing Member States to block decisions.

"Europe will probably always remain a union of states," said **Valéry Giscard d'Estaing**, President of the European Convention and VIP Speaker in Brussels. He went on to liken Europe to a "romantic goddess" we should all view with affection. Indeed, he added, although the Convention was not agreed unanimously on 10 June last, it was agreed in that very spirit of affection.

The "enthusiasm" generated for the Convention came at the end of the 16-month period of meetings, he said. Early division among participants gradually dissipated, as the Convention eliminated "extreme solutions" and set about creating a "balance" between institutions and countries, and between the EU and its Member States. "We reached convergence in the final stages," he added.

The Convention rightly paid "lots of attention" to the accession countries, he said. Hence the proposal to delay until 2009 the launch of the new European Commission, with voting and non-voting Commissioners. The idea, said the Convention President, was to give these new countries time to feel they were "equal" to other EU members. He also insisted that the rebalancing of European institutions was designed to ensure that "all elements work together."

"We drew up a text that is short and readable, based on Europe's values and goals," remarked Giscard, "before working on the instruments and policies to take Europe forward." It was his hope that the October 2003 IGC would not unravel the draft treaty, since "all the areas for possible discussion have already been looked at in detail by the Convention."

Giscard said the EU would very soon have a "stable President, a Foreign Minister and a Parliament that works like others in the world." He said that today's media scepticism concerning the Constitutional Treaty would be forgotten as quickly as the arguments that once raged over the euro. Could Europe go any further? "My role is to go as far as possible without breaking the system's unity," he concluded.

DEBATE VII

“A CAMARADERIE OF DIFFERENT POLITICAL OPINIONS”

The seventh and final debate in the *Hearing from Europe* series featured Denmark, Latvia, Slovenia and Turkey. “This is probably the richest mix of different cultures for this week’s debates,” said **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of *Friends of Europe* and hub moderator, “ranging from small but determined Latvia to the mainly Islamic nation of Turkey, possibly the 28th member of the European Union.”

Panellists speaking by live satellite link from Denmark felt, as had most previous countries in the week’s debates, that the new draft Constitution was a good starting point for further discussion. **Lone Dybkjaer**, Member of the European Parliament and Denmark’s former Minister of Environmental Affairs, went further in her praise: “Nowhere else in the world has such good definitions of values such as justice, equality and human rights.”

Her colleague **Lykke Friis**, European Director of the Confederation of Danish Industries, liked the way the draft treaty gathered all previous EU treaties into one document. But she thought it would be hard to explain to the Danish public exactly where institutional powers would soon reside. She likened the end of the Convention process to the handing out of Christmas presents, with something for everyone. “We have presidents for the European Council, the European Commission and a rotating presidency below that,” she said. “Isn’t there a danger they will all end up fighting one another?” Would not the EU soon resemble a plane with many pilots? Ahead of her nation’s next referendum (the seventh held on the EU), on the draft treaty itself, she worried that Danes would fail to see the importance of institutional power changes. “If we lose, it’s hard to see where Denmark could find new opt-outs. So this will be a referendum on Denmark’s EU membership.”

The extension of majority voting would help an enlarged EU, thought **Erik Boel**, Chairman of the European Movement for Denmark, who called this change a new “cornerstone” for the Union. He welcomed the stronger European Parliament but expressed reservations about the Convention’s decision not to give the Parliament co-decision powers on taxation, social security and foreign policy.

The debate moved on to Latvia. **Roberts Zile**, Minister for Transport and Communications, said he had mixed feelings about the Convention’s conclusions. He liked the way economic and social issues remained under national competence and the fact the EU now had a legal personality. But he was unsatisfied with its new institutional structure and concerned about Parts III and IV of the Constitutional Treaty. **Dzintra Bungs**, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of International Affairs, was unsure whether the EU would become a superstate or a superpower. “We want a vote on this,” he said, adding that representation for small countries like his own was crucial.

Speaking on behalf of Latvia’s business community, **Valdis Lokenbahs**, President of A/S DATI Group, expressed concern that local companies would not be able to compete with large firms in the EU. Which is why he would like to see a change in the European Parliament’s decision-making. He also wanted small countries to fight for their national languages to be used in the EU. Ziles, however, thought that Latvian would benefit from increased exposure to other European languages.

Reforms proposed by the Convention would make it clearer who does what in the EU, said the European Commissioner for Regional Policy and Intergovernmental Conference and VIP Speaker in Brussels, **Michel Barnier**. He added that the EU would be more

effective on the world stage, thanks to the future Minister for Foreign Affairs.” The Convention has been a good experiment for everyone, he said, arguing that Europe would no longer be a matter for experts alone but would involve all citizens – directly or through their national parliaments. He ended by calling for Europeans to show support for the new Constitution.

Though not comfortable with all of the draft treaty – especially the changes to the European Commission, Slovenian panellist **Dimitrij Rupel**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that he could “live with them.” What he feared most was any reopening of the debate about the Constitution at the next IGC. His colleague **Marijan Mir**, President of Pivovarna Union, said that his country’s large companies would be able to compete within the EU, but that civil servants and companies formally “nursed by the State” would find it harder to adapt. He also underlined the tremendous potential for Slovenia to expand its markets.

The EU seems to be adapted only for good times and not for long economic depressions, said **Joze Mencinger**, former Minister for Economy and Rector of Ljubljana University. To make his point, he said that Europeans were capable of “bending their own rules”, such as the Stability and Growth Pact. On civil society, he added that Slovenia was concerned about over-centralisation of power in the EU, which would remind Slovenians of the former Yugoslavia. He ended by controversially suggesting that any democratic deficit in the EU might actually help the Union move forward more easily with enlargement.

The final country to have its say in the *Hearing from Europe* week was Turkey. “European democracy is rightly shifting from the national level towards the European Parliament,” said **Kemal Derviş**, MP, Member of the European Convention and former Minister for Economics. He also liked the strong social dimension in the draft treaty. Europeans should one day directly elect their President, he proposed. As for his nation’s relationship with the EU, he reminded the audience that Turkey began working towards membership before many of the candidate countries and implemented a customs union with the EU seven years ago. “Turkey is a big supporter of the European project,” he said. This point was reinforced by **Haluk Kabaalioglu**, Dean of Law Faculty at Yeditepe University and Member of the Board of Directors of IKV: “We have had a wide debate in civil society about Europe, with some debates held almost nightly on Turkish television.”

Turkey’s entry into the EU would be advantageous for the EU, thought **Sedat Aloglu**, Owner and Chief Executive Officer of Fenis Holding. For it would expand the Union’s social and cultural diversity and “make matters clearer regarding Islamic faith.” He even suggested that Europe could be about to enter its “second Enlightenment”. Aloglu welcomed the extension of the European Parliament’s powers, but expected the text of the new Constitution would change at the IGC.

In the week’s final question and answer session, several people wondered about the future for candidate countries’ languages. Latvia’s Robert Zile recognised that it would be cheaper and easier to use English alone for debate and documents, but still thought it important for every Member State to be able to use its mother tongue. However, Denmark’s Lone Dybkjaer argued that the EU should either decide to use English only or to use every language.

A Turkish questioner asked about the effect of EU enlargement. “We may see increased inequalities in European welfare systems,” suggested Erik Boel of Denmark. What did Turkey think of the EU’s position on minorities? “We have many ethnic backgrounds here,” said Kemal Derviş, “but we have adopted the Copenhagen Treaty on human rights.” Latvia’s Dzintra Bungs said that her country was also discussing ways of helping Russian-speakers within Latvia, for example by offering them Latvian citizenship.

Did Slovenia believe that proposed changes to the European Parliament would reduce the EU's democratic deficit? "We had some criticisms, because the threshold for MEPs was set too low," said Dimitrij Rupel. He added that in general Slovenians think that the Parliament is a "good legitimating device and that it ensures European democracy."

In his conclusion, hub moderator Giles Merritt admitted that when *Friends of Europe* had embarked on this project of talking to all 28 countries in the European Convention, it was unsure how the event would work. "Some said it would just produce a Babel of conflicting opinions. But I can now say that we're glad to have proved those critics wrong." He highlighted the way the seven debates had created a "curious camaraderie of different political opinions", thanks in part to the use of the latest videoconferencing and Internet technologies. "This technology is the surely the way ahead," he added, "allowing Brussels to also listen to the rest of the Europe rather than just talking to it."

He hoped that the next IGC would "take Europe further" and perhaps lead to the emergence of a left/right spectrum of political opinion. It was also his belief that the *Hearing from Europe* series had contributed in some way to the negotiations on the EU's new Constitution.

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