



European Parliament Press releases

Future of Europe/European integration

Joint parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe puts enlargement in the limelight

On the eve of "Europe Day", nearly 250 members of the European Parliament and EU national Parliaments gathered in Brussels to discuss the future of Europe now that the introduction of a new treaty has been put on hold. In his opening speech, EP president Josep Borrell called for a "period of proposals" to follow the "period of reflection", which was introduced after the draft constitutional treaty was rejected by referendums in France and the Netherlands.

Mr Borrell reminded the meeting that the Nice Treaty was "insufficient for the future" and that there were "pressing questions to be answered", even though "the answers are not always easy to find". The Convention, which drew up the first draft of the Constitution, has perhaps "underestimated the unease of our fellow citizens", he said, adding, "we are gathered here to debate how we can re-launch the dynamism of the European project and restore confidence among the people who have elected us". At the moment, the EU was focussing too much on sectoral policies, he said, "as if the lack of a comprehensive European project is making us resigned to a Europe of projects".

Mr Borrell didn't want to pretend that the two-day meeting in the European Parliament was going to solve everything, "but the simple fact that we, European and national parliamentarians, work on this together, for me is symbolic and a sign of hope".

Austrian Parliament President Andreas Khol, who co-chaired the meeting with Mr Borrell, pointed out that the four big themes to be debated - the EU in the world and the borders of the EU; globalisation and the European economic and social model; freedom, security and justice; and the future resources of the EU - were all linked. "Who is going to fund the further development of the EU in terms of foreign policy and of the much-discussed European social model? Money doesn't flow from the cash dispenser". Khol added that the

European Court of Justice, perceived by many as the driving force behind EU integration, "should act according to the legislation and not act too quickly". His colleague from the Austrian Bundesrat, Sissy Roth-Halvax, listed as main problems "How to involve the national parliaments? They have a role to play in monitoring the activities of the EU. And how to bring the activities of EU institutions, some of which are best carried out at a regional level, closer to the citizen?", she asked.

Four working groups

After the opening of the meeting, participants split up into four working groups. The working group on the EU in the world and the borders of the EU was chaired by Elmar Brok (EPP-ED, DE) and Jari Vilén, Chairman of the Grand Committee of the Finnish Eduskunta.

Future enlargements require a new treaty

Enlargement was at the centre of the debate, as the present EU Treaty makes any further enlargements after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania impossible. Some parliamentarians therefore voiced grave doubts over future enlargement. "On the basis of current treaties, further enlargements will be hard to tackle", warned Carlos Carnero Gonzalez (PSE, ES), while Klaus Hänsch (PSE, DE) said "after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania a lengthy period of deepening will be needed". Lord Hannay of Chiswick (House of Lords) worried that further enlargements would be impossible after the accession of Croatia, something that the founding fathers of Europe surely wouldn't have wanted. Deputy speaker of the Slovenian Parliament Vasja Klavora pointed out that past enlargements had brought many benefits to both old and new Member States and that finding a solution was imperative.

Hubert Haenel (French Senate) reminded the meeting that France has changed its Constitution so that after the accession of Croatia, any future enlargement will be submitted to a referendum. Greek MP Christos Papoutsis was all in favour of future enlargements, on condition that these would not weaken the European project or the institutions of the EU.

A pause

Bronislaw Geremek (ALDE, PL) said that the EU and its citizens had tired of enlargement and that a pause is advisable. After that, the EU could go on to take in Croatia and the Balkan states. French MP Pierre Lequiller agreed and said that as far as enlargement was concerned, a time-out was necessary in which to further deepen the EU. For him creating a convergence between the old and the new members in order to start up new projects is central to the EU's absorption capacity.

Karin Thorborg of Sweden was happy with the present reflection period, which made it possible to review the EU's undemocratic decision-making processes and its policies, which are detrimental to poor countries and shape all countries in the same liberal market mould.

Make the treaty clearer

Andrew Duff (ALDE, UK) said that the old Part III of the draft treaty should be renegotiated in order to make the accession processes far more clear and to describe the thresholds that candidate countries must cross, while making clear that these thresholds are expressed in terms of liberal democracy and not of history, geography or culture. Hungarian MP Attila Gruber also felt that citizens might be more willing to accept a new treaty if it were more easily comprehensible. His Portuguese colleague Armando Franca saw things more straightforwardly: problems in foreign policy and European competitiveness could be solved if the constitutional treaty were implemented.

Future borders

Charles Tannock (EPP-ED, UK) was worried about the proliferation of mini-Member States if the EU continued to expand and countries such as Montenegro and Kosovo also gained independence, as this would seriously upset the balance between big and small Member States. Oskars Kastēns from Latvia praised enlargement as the biggest success of EU foreign policy and said that politicians needed to sell it much better as such. The borders of the EU, he continued, are fairly well laid down in the Treaty, but one must remember that they are more about values and in the minds of Europeans than on a map. Austrian MP Werner Fasslabend said that the EU would increase in size by one third if Turkey and Ukraine joined and that this would drastically change the nature of the EU. He therefore favoured an intermediate status for such countries.

EU role in the world

On EU foreign policy there was a large measure of consensus. Introducing the debate, German MP Michael Roth, who will report on the results of the working group, said, "I don't want a renationalisation. Europe is the response to globalisation. No Member State can go it alone. Citizens expect more from the EU in terms of foreign policy". This view was echoed by Mr Carnero: "CFSP is a factor of world stability. Therefore we want a Minister of Foreign Affairs and some sort of Energy Minister as well". Mr Brok added that "Member States cannot achieve much on their own: think of bodies like the WTO. In the future, the transatlantic community will continue to be a driving force in external affairs."

Mr Kastēns said that the draft constitutional treaty had contained all the answers: a common defence policy, security guarantees, a president, a foreign minister, common foreign representation and a legal personality. However, Belgian MP Stef Goris worried about the lack of parliamentary scrutiny in the EU foreign policy, in particular in the case of foreign missions such as to the Congo.

Mr Gruber added that civilian cooperation between EU states, such as in the fight against recent floods, appealed far more to citizens than military cooperation.

08/05/2006

Joint Parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe

Working group on "the European Union in the world and the borders of the Union"

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7839-128-05-19-901-20060503IPR07838-08-05-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm

L'élargissement au centre des débats de la rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe

A la veille de la Journée de l'Europe, près de 250 députés européens et des Parlements nationaux l'UE se sont retrouvés à Bruxelles pour débattre de l'avenir de l'Europe à l'heure où la ratification du nouveau traité marque une pause. Dans son allocution d'ouverture, le Président du PE, M. Josep Borrell, a plaidé pour une "période de proposition" succédant à la "période de réflexion" qui s'est ouverte après le double "non" à la Constitution en France et aux Pays-Bas.

M. Borrell a rappelé à l'Assemblée que le Traité de Nice n'était "pas à la hauteur de l'avenir" et que "des réponses devaient être apportées à des questions urgentes, même si elles ne sont pas toujours simples à trouver". La Convention, qui avait engendré le premier jet du nouveau traité, a peut-être "sous-estimé le malaise ressenti par les citoyens" et, a-t-il ajouté, "nous sommes réunis ici pour voir comment relancer le projet européen et restaurer la confiance parmi les électeurs. A l'heure actuelle, l'UE est trop axée sur des politiques sectorielles, comme si, en l'absence d'un projet européen global, nous nous étions résignés à une Europe de projets".

M. Borrell a souligné être conscient que cette réunion de deux jours au Parlement européen ne résoudrait pas tout, "mais le simple fait que nous, parlementaires nationaux et européens, conjugions nos efforts dans ce domaine est pour moi un symbole et un signe d'espoir".

Le Président du Parlement autrichien, M. Andreas Khol, qui co-présidait la réunion avec M. Borrell, a fait observer que les quatre grands thèmes objets des débats étaient tous liés : l'UE dans le monde et les frontières de l'UE; la mondialisation et le modèle socio-économique européen, la liberté, la sécurité et la justice et, enfin, les ressources futures de l'UE. "Qui financera l'évolution future de l'UE en termes de politique étrangère ou le modèle social européen tant décrié ? Il ne suffit pas de prélever de l'argent au distributeur !", a-t-il déclaré. Pour lui, la Cour de Justice des CE, considérée par beaucoup comme le moteur de l'intégration européenne, "doit agir en application de la législation et ne pas agir de manière précipitée". Sa collègue du Bundesrat autrichien, Mme Sissy Roth-Halvax, a énuméré ce que sont, pour elle, les

principaux problèmes : "Comment associer davantage les parlements nationaux qui ont un rôle à jouer dans le contrôle de l'activité de l'UE, et comment rapprocher du citoyen les activités des institutions européennes, sachant que le niveau régional serait plus approprié pour gérer certaines de ces activités".

Quatre groupes de travail

Après la séance inaugurale, les parlementaires se sont répartis en quatre groupes de travail. Le groupe de travail "l'UE dans le monde et les frontières de l'UE" était présidé par M. Elmar Brok (PPE-DE, DE) et M. Jari Vilen, président du Grand Conseil de l'Eduskunta finlandais.

Les élargissements futurs requièrent un nouveau traité

L'élargissement était au cœur du débat puisque l'actuel Traité sur l'UE ne permet pas de nouveaux élargissements après l'adhésion de la Bulgarie et de la Roumanie. Plusieurs parlementaires ont, en conséquence, émis de sérieux doutes quant à un futur élargissement. "Si l'on se base sur les traités en vigueur, il sera difficile de gérer d'autres élargissements", a averti M. Carlos Carnero Gonzalez (PSE, ES), tandis que M. Klaus Hänsch (PSE, DE) affirmait que, "après l'adhésion de la Bulgarie et de la Roumanie, une longue période d'approfondissement sera indispensable". Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Chambre des Lords) a exprimé son inquiétude devant l'impossibilité d'autres élargissements après l'adhésion de la Croatie, situation que les pères fondateurs de l'Europe n'auraient certainement pas voulue. Le vice-président du Parlement slovène, M. Vasja Klavora, a fait remarquer que les élargissements passés avaient été source de nombreux bénéfices pour les anciens comme pour les nouveaux Etats membres et qu'il était impératif de trouver une solution.

M. Hubert Haenel (Sénat français) a rappelé aux participants que la France avait révisé sa constitution afin qu'après l'adhésion de la Croatie, tout élargissement ultérieur soit soumis à un référendum. M. Christos Papoutsis, député grec, s'est dit tout à fait favorable à de futurs élargissements, à condition qu'ils n'affaiblissent pas le projet européen ou les institutions de l'UE.

Une pause

M. Bronislaw Geremek (ADLE, PL) a estimé que l'élargissement avait provoqué la lassitude de l'UE et de ses citoyens et qu'une pause s'imposait. Ensuite, l'UE pourrait reprendre sa marche et accueillir la Croatie et les autres pays balkaniques. M. Pierre Lequiller, député français, s'accordait avec lui pour dire qu'en matière d'élargissement, une parenthèse s'imposait pour approfondir encore l'UE. Pour lui, la clé de la capacité d'absorption de l'UE réside dans la concrétisation d'une convergence entre les anciens et les nouveaux Etats membres, permettant de lancer de nouveaux projets.

Mme Karin Thorborg (Suède) se félicite de l'actuelle période de réflexion qui a permis de se pencher à nouveau sur des processus décisionnels et des politiques communautaires peu démocratiques qui portent préjudice aux pays pauvres et coulent tous les pays dans le même moule libéral fondé sur le marché.

Clarifier le traité

M. Andrew Duff (ADLE, UK) s'est prononcé pour une renégociation de l'ancienne partie III du projet de traité en vue de rendre beaucoup plus clairs les processus d'adhésion et de définir les seuils à franchir par les pays candidats, tout en stipulant clairement que ces seuils se traduisent en termes de démocratie libre et non pas d'histoire, de géographie ou de culture. M. Attila Gruber, député hongrois, a jugé lui aussi que les citoyens pourraient se montrer plus enclins à accepter un nouveau traité pourvu qu'il soit plus compréhensible. Son collègue portugais, M. Armando Franca, a exposé une conception plus radicale des choses: les problèmes touchant à la politique extérieure et à la compétitivité de l'Europe trouveraient une solution si le traité constitutionnel était mis en œuvre.

Futures frontières

M. Charles Tannock (PPE-DE, UK) a dit craindre une prolifération de mini-Etats membres en cas de poursuite de l'extension de l'UE et d'accession du Monténégro et du Kosovo à l'indépendance. En effet, l'équilibre entre grands et petits Etats membres s'en trouverait grandement modifié. M. Oskars Kastens (Lettonie) a qualifié l'élargissement de plus grand succès de la politique étrangère commune, ajoutant que les politiciens doivent le présenter sous un angle bien plus favorable. Selon lui, les frontières de l'UE sont assez bien définies dans le traité, mais il convient de ne pas oublier qu'elles concernent surtout des valeurs et qu'elles se retrouvent davantage dans les têtes des européens que sur les cartes géographiques. M. Werner Fasslabend, député autrichien, a rappelé que l'UE grandirait d'un tiers en taille en cas d'adhésion de la Turquie et de l'Ukraine et qu'il en résulterait une modification fondamentale de la nature de l'UE. C'est pourquoi, il s'est exprimé en faveur d'un statut intermédiaire pour ces pays.

Le rôle de l'UE dans le monde

En matière de politique étrangère commune, le consensus était assez large. Lançant le débat, le député allemand, M. Michael Roth, chargé de faire rapport sur les conclusions du groupe de travail, a déclaré : "Je ne veux pas d'une renationalisation. La réponse à la mondialisation, c'est l'Europe. Aucune Etat membre ne peut faire cavalier seul. C'est en matière de politique étrangère que les attentes du citoyen envers l'UE sont les plus grandes". Cet avis était partagé par M. Carnero : "la PESC est un facteur de stabilité mondiale. C'est pourquoi nous réclamons un ministre des Affaires étrangères mais aussi un ministre de l'énergie". M. Brok a ajouté que "les Etats membres ne peuvent arriver individuellement à de grands résultats : songeons à des

organes tels que l'OMC. A l'avenir, la communauté transatlantique continuera à jouer un rôle moteur dans le domaine des affaires extérieures".

M. Kastens a indiqué que toutes les réponses étaient contenues dans le projet de traité constitutionnel : une politique de défense commune, des garanties en matière de sécurité, a président, un ministre des Affaires étrangères, une représentation commune à l'étranger et une personnalité juridique. Cependant, le député belge, M. Stef Goris, a déploré le manque de contrôle parlementaire sur la politique étrangère de l'UE, en particulier dans les cas de missions à l'étranger, comme au Congo, par exemple.

M. Gruber a dit également que la coopération civile entre les Etats membres de l'UE, comme dans le cas des secours à la suite des récentes inondations, parlait beaucoup plus à l'imagination des citoyens que la coopération militaire.

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Rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe

Groupe de travail sur "l'Union européenne dans le monde et les frontières de l'UE"

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The European social model as a positive answer to globalisation

The need to find a positive answer to globalisation and a common approach to problems like high unemployment, low economic growth, a lack of trust in the European project and the existence and shape of the European social model were at the heart of the debate in the joint parliamentary meeting working group on globalisation and the European economic and social model.

A number of speakers said globalisation is Europe's major challenge at the moment, but noted that it also raises fear for many citizens. Mr Othmar Karas (EPP-ED, AT), who will present a report on the discussion, said it is essential to paint a positive picture of globalisation. "Nobody wants to create fear via globalisation. One has to accept that globalisation is taking place and we need to frame globalisation by internal and external measures." Helga Machne (Member of the Austrian Parliament) said "globalisation is a good thing for Europe and should be used to solve the problem of unemployment and stagnation of economic growth". Mr Karas said globalisation should not imply social dumping and a loss of quality. Along with many speakers, he stressed that protectionism and nationalism are not the answer. Instead Europe needs to intensify collaboration and coordination and to enhance mutual understanding as well as the respect of differences.

Pierre Jonckheer (Greens/EFA, BE) referred to a recent Eurobarometer study showing that citizens want more decisions taken at European level. The need

to enhance the trust of citizens was emphasised by Outi Ojala (Member of the Finnish parliament), and echoed by many others. Edite Estrela (PSE, PT) noted that "the world has changed but Europe has not adapted."

The future of the European Economic and Social model

Another key issue in the debate was how to preserve the European Social model in the context of globalisation, and whether there is one European Social model or several different models.

Soraya Rodriguez (Member of the Spanish Congress) said national policies can no longer guarantee social rights and that we need a European answer. The desire by citizens for Europe to address social issues was emphasised in several speeches. Burning problems such as social systems and population trends need to be addressed otherwise Europe will be "an old continent and not a continent of growth", warned Mr Karas. Pervenche Berès (PSE, FR) said, "the European economic and social model is a key aspect of the European competitiveness" and called for further reflection on this point.

Views diverged on the number of European social models, but speakers agreed that the perception is different from inside and outside Europe. Proinsias De Rossa (PSE, IE) said, "we do have a common social model driven by common values...but different systems".

Caspar Einem (Member of the Austrian Parliament, vice president of the subcommittee of European affairs) called for a "common European economic policy" and not 25, in order to ensure growth and to face challenges of globalisation.

The Lisbon strategy

Opinions varied on the Lisbon strategy and the open method of coordination. Many agreed that the Lisbon process is not working properly, but, as Neven Mimica (Croatian parliament, president for the committee on European integration) said, it is part of the solution if implemented properly. Mr Karas said it is necessary to find a solution to the existing clash between the good Lisbon goals and the lack of implementation on national level.

Summing up, Ms Berès welcomed the debate and underlined that it is important "to listen to those we represent". Members agreed that this kind of exchange is very fruitful, in particular as the issues at stake are of concern on a national as well as on a European level.

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Joint Parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe

Working group on "globalisation and the European social and economic model"

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Le modèle social européen, réponse positive à la mondialisation

La nécessité d'apporter une réponse positive à la mondialisation et de s'entendre sur une approche commune de problèmes tels que le taux élevé de chômage, la faiblesse de la croissance économique, le manque de confiance dans le projet européen, l'existence et le profil du modèle social européen ont été au cœur du débat du groupe de travail sur la mondialisation et le modèle social et économique européen tenu à l'occasion de la rencontre parlementaire.

Aux yeux de nombreux intervenants, si la mondialisation constitue le principal défi qui se pose aujourd'hui à l'Europe, elle suscite également les craintes de nombreux citoyens. Othmar Karas (PPE-DE, AT), qui présentera un rapport sur ce débat, a jugé essentiel de donner une image positive de la mondialisation. "Personne ne souhaite faire naître des craintes par rapport à la mondialisation. Il faut accepter que la mondialisation s'opère et que nous devons l'encadrer par des mesures internes et externes". Helga Machne (députée du Parlement autrichien) a estimé que "la mondialisation est une bonne chose pour l'Europe et doit être utilisée pour résoudre les problèmes du chômage et de la stagnation de la croissance économique". Selon M. Karas, la mondialisation ne doit pas entraîner le dumping social et la baisse de qualité. A l'instar de nombreux autres orateurs, il a souligné que le protectionnisme et le nationalisme n'apportent pas la réponse. L'Europe doit plutôt intensifier la coopération et la coordination et renforcer la compréhension mutuelle et le respect des différences.

Pierre Jonckheer (Verts/ALE, BE) a fait état d'une récente étude de l'Eurobaromètre selon laquelle les citoyens souhaitent que davantage de décisions soient prises au niveau européen. Outi Ojala (membre du Parlement finlandais) a insisté sur la nécessité d'accroître la confiance des citoyens, trouvant des échos auprès de bien d'autres intervenants. Edite Estrela (PSE, PT) a déclaré que "le monde avait changé mais que l'Europe ne s'était pas adaptée".

L'avenir du modèle économique et social européen

La question de savoir comment préserver le modèle social européen dans ce contexte de mondialisation, mais aussi de savoir s'il existe un seul ou différents modèles sociaux européens a constitué un autre thème majeur du débat.

Soraya Rodriguez (membre du Congrès espagnol) a noté que les politiques nationales ne sont plus en mesure de garantir les droits sociaux et qu'une réponse européenne est indispensable. L'attente exprimée par les citoyens de voir l'Europe s'attaquer aux problèmes sociaux a été soulignée par plusieurs orateurs. Des questions d'une actualité brûlante relatives aux systèmes sociaux et aux tendances démographiques réclament des solutions, sans quoi l'Europe deviendra "un vieux continent et non pas un continent de

croissance", a lancé M. Karas. Pour Pervenche Berès (PSE, FR), "le modèle économique et social européen est un aspect fondamental de la compétitivité européenne" et elle a demandé que la réflexion se poursuive sur ce point.

Sur la pluralité des modèles sociaux européens, les vues divergeaient, mais les intervenants ont reconnu que la perception est différente que l'on soit à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur de l'Europe. Proinsias De Rossa (PSE, IE) a souligné : "Nous connaissons un modèle social commun guidé par des valeurs communes... et des systèmes différents".

Caspar Einem (membre du Parlement autrichien, vice-président de la sous-commission des affaires européennes) a plaidé pour "une politique économique européenne commune" en lieu et place des 25 politiques actuelles, afin d'assurer la croissance et de faire face aux défis de la mondialisation.

La stratégie de Lisbonne

Les avis différaient au sujet de la stratégie de Lisbonne et de la méthode ouverte de coordination. Ils furent nombreux à estimer que le processus de Lisbonne ne fonctionne pas convenablement mais, comme l'a relevé Neven Mimica (Parlement croate, président de la commission de l'intégration européenne), ce processus fait partie de la solution s'il est correctement mis en œuvre. M. Karas a expliqué qu'il était indispensable de trouver une parade à l'actuelle antinomie entre les objectifs pertinents de Lisbonne et l'absence de mise en œuvre au niveau national.

En conclusion, Mme Berès s'est félicitée de la tenue de ce débat et a souligné qu'il était important "d'être à l'écoute ceux que nous représentons". Les parlementaires ont convenu que ce type d'échanges est très fructueux, d'autant plus que les sujets abordés présentent un intérêt tant national qu'europpéen.

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Rencontre parlementaire sur le Future de l'Europe

Groupe de travail sur la "mondialisation et le modèle socio-économique européen"

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7841-128-05-19-901-20060503IPR07840-08-05-2006-2006-false/default_fr.htm

Further debate needed on security & justice

A wide range of issues related to security and justice were debated Monday in the framework of the joint Parliamentary meeting on the future of Europe. The need to improve the decision-making process in this area, while respecting national traditions, and the possibility of a common EU immigration policy were the main issues.

The meeting was co-chaired by Jo Leinen (PES, DE), the Chairman of the EP's Committee on Constitutional Affairs, and Michael Grosse-Brömer (Christian democrat), Chairman of the Bundestag's subcommittee on European law. "Eurobarometer polls show people's concerns in this area and their expectations vis-à-vis Europe", said Jo Leinen in his opening statement. "We have the task of re-establishing confidence among citizens in Europe", added Mr Grosse-Brömer.

Mutual recognition: the way towards a more effective fight against cross-border crime

The working group rapporteur, Johannes Koskinen a member of the Grand Committee of Eduskunta in Finland, regretted that "it is slow and difficult" to take decisions in the area of justice and home affairs at EU level as "Member states tend to safeguard their national interests very strongly". This idea was backed by several participants: Astrid Thors, a liberal Member of the Finnish Parliament, said that decisions in the area of justice should be taken by qualified majority instead of, as is now the case, by unanimity, while Martine Roure (PSE, FR) stated that "the pillar structure of the treaties should be abolished".

In contrast, Elisabeth Arnold, President of the Danish Parliament Committee on European Affairs, stressed the need to proceed carefully in harmonising national criminal law as this issue affects national sovereignty. John Denham, Chairman of the UK House of Commons' Committee on Home Affairs, said: "we should focus on developing practical cooperation to solve practical problems". According to Mr Denham, because cultural differences among Member States are so wide the solution to improving the fight against crime cannot be to extend EU competence in this area.

Mr Leinen pointed out that in certain areas a system of mutual recognition of judgments is highly desirable to efficiently tackle major cross-border crimes, such as terrorism, trafficking of human beings and international smuggling. Mr Koskinen, in his concluding remarks, said there are still different opinions on how far the EU should go in harmonising procedural law.

An EU Immigration policy?

On the issue of whether the EU should have a joint immigration policy, national and European parliamentarians had different ideas. For Michalis Chysohoidis, a socialist member of the Hellenic Parliament, the "time has come for a common immigration policy". Paulis Klavins, a member of the Latvian Parliament, raised the issue of countries with external European borders and said the EU should agree to some principles on a common answer to immigration related problems.

According to Ryszard Legutko, Polish Senate Vice-President, a common immigration policy is the ultimate goal but cannot be achieved now. Lord Marlesford, a member of the House of Lords' committee for the European Union, said immigration policy must remain under national control and agreed

with Mr Denham's comment that he "didn't believe" such a goal was "attainable". Mrs Arnold said that Europe needs minimum common standards with regards to asylum policy to avoid discrimination among the Member States in the treatment of refugees.

The rapporteur Mr Koskinen will prepare a report on the debate to be discussed tomorrow at the plenary session of the Joint Parliamentary meeting.

08/05/2006

Joint Parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe

Working group on "What are the prospects for the area of freedom, security and justice?"

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Sécurité et Justice : le débat doit se poursuivre

Les débats tenus ce lundi dans le cadre de la rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe ont porté sur un large éventail de sujets touchant à la sécurité et à la justice. La nécessité d'améliorer - dans le respect des traditions nationales - le processus décisionnel dans ce domaine et les perspectives d'une politique commune de l'immigration ont constitué les principaux thèmes de discussion.

La réunion était coprésidée par Jo Leinen (PSE, DE), président de la commission des affaires constitutionnelles du PE, et Michael Grosse-Brömer (démocrate-chrétien), président de la sous-commission "Législation européenne" au Bundestag. "Les sondages réalisés pour l'Eurobaromètre révèlent les craintes des gens et leurs attentes vis-à-vis de l'Europe dans ce domaine", a déclaré M. Leinen dans son exposé introductif. "Nous avons la mission d restaurer la confiance des citoyens en l'Europe", a dit pour sa part M. Grosse-Brömer.

Reconnaissance mutuelle : pour accroître l'efficacité de la lutte contre la criminalité transfrontière

Le rapporteur du groupe de travail, Johannes Koskinen, membre du Grand Conseil de l'Eduskunta finlandais, a dit à quel point il regrettait que prendre des décisions dans le domaine de la justice et des affaires intérieures soit si "lent et difficile" au niveau de l'UE, "les États membres ayant tendance à préserver à toute force leurs intérêts nationaux". Plusieurs participants ont abondé dans ce sens. Astrid Thors, députée libérale au Parlement finlandais, a estimé que dans le domaine de la justice, les décisions devraient se prendre à la majorité qualifiée et non pas comme c'est le cas aujourd'hui, à l'unanimité tandis que Martine Roure (PSE, FR) préconisait quant à elle que "soit abolie la structure à piliers des traités".

Au contraire, Elisabeth Arnold, présidente de la commission des affaires européennes du Parlement danois, a souligné la nécessité de procéder avec prudence à l'harmonisation des législations pénales nationales puisque cette question touche à la souveraineté nationale. John Denham, président de la commission des affaires intérieures de la Chambre des Communes, a déclaré : "Nous devons nous concentrer sur une coopération pratique accrue pour résoudre les problèmes pratiques". M. Denham a expliqué que les différences culturelles entre les Etats membres sont telles que la solution pour améliorer la lutte contre la criminalité ne peut résider dans une extension des compétences de l'UE dans ce domaine.

M. Leinen a estimé d'autre part qu'il serait très souhaitable d'instaurer un système de reconnaissance mutuelle des verdicts prononcés pour faire face à la grande criminalité transfrontière comme le terrorisme, la traite des êtres humains et la contrebande internationale. M. Koskinen, dans ses conclusions, a déclaré que les vues divergent toujours sur le point de savoir jusqu'à quel point l'UE doit aller dans l'harmonisation des procédures.

Une politique commune de l'immigration ?

A la question de savoir si l'UE doit se doter d'une politique commune en matière d'immigration, les idées des parlementaires nationaux et européens divergent. Pour Michalis Chysohoidis, député socialiste au Parlement grec, "le temps est venu d'instaurer une politique d'immigration commune". Paulis Klavins, député au Parlement letton, a évoqué le problème des pays situés aux frontières extérieures de l'Europe. Pour lui, l'UE devrait convenir de quelques principes pour apporter une réponse commune aux problèmes liés à l'immigration.

Selon Ryszard Legutko, vice-président du Sénat polonais, une politique commune d'immigration est l'objectif final, mais il ne peut être atteint aujourd'hui. Estimant que la politique en matière d'immigration doit rester sous le contrôle des Etats membres, Lord Marlesford, membre de la commission "Union européenne" de la Chambre des Lords, a appuyé l'avis exprimé par M. Denham qui ne croit pas qu'un tel objectif soit à notre portée. Mme Arnold a déclaré que l'Europe a besoin de normes minimum communes en matière d'asile politique afin de prévenir toute discrimination entre les Etats membres du point de vue du traitement des réfugiés.

08/05/2006

Rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe

Groupe de travail sur "les perspectives de l'espace de liberté, sécurité et justice".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7843-128-05-19-901-20060503|PR07842-08-05-2006-2006-false/default_fr.htm

MEPs, National Parliaments agree own-resources system must be reformed

There was broad agreement among participants of the working group on "future resources of the European Union" that the existing own-resources system should be replaced by a scheme more understandable to the public. Whether this system should be tax-based or built on existing instruments was the subject of a lively debate, as was the nature and the objectives of the Community's budget itself.

Working group rapporteur Lord Grenfell from the UK House of Lords explained that a new form of own-resource would have to be "carefully scrutinised", and that differences on whether it should be tax-based or not "should be aired". Own-resources have been in the limelight since the start of the talks on the funding of the long-term spending plan of the European Union, the so-called "Financial Perspective". The own-resource system has not been reformed for almost 20 years, and many linked this with the difficulty in agreeing a new Financial Perspective for the 2007-13 period.

EU tax and the public

"An EU tax can hardly be justified to the citizens at this stage and would certainly not help the cause of the European Union," argued Christian Philip from the French National Assembly. "Any tax would have to be comprehensible by the public," Danish Folketinget Member Svend Auken said, "and thus everyone would understand it if we took it from a share of the benefits made by oil companies". Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, DE) was also in favour of an energy tax, to complement the existing own-resources system, which "wouldn't lead the people to think they pay more for the EU".

One of the main stumbling blocks in the way of such an EU tax is the need for unanimity between national governments for a thorough EU-wide fiscal harmonisation. Spanish Senator and former MEP Carles Gasoliba doubted it was ever going to be possible to achieve unanimity in Council on such a far-reaching decision. "A tax-based system would have to be applied with a proper supra-national fiscal regime, which ensures that EU money is used transparently and managed appropriately," said Ilias Kallioras of the Greek Parliament.

Participants were not short of imagination for new forms of funding: taxes on flights, company profits or even on short text messages sent by mobile phones. The supporter of this idea, EP own resources rapporteur Alain Lamassoure (EPP-ED, FR), also believed that the new system would have to be clearly linked with benefits drawn from the European Union. Thanks to the internal market "exchanges between countries have ballooned, so everyone would understand that the money to finance the EU should come from the benefits engendered by the EU," he explained.

The nature of the budget

Richard Corbett (PES, UK) felt that the need to find a new way to fund the EU depended on a visible identification of the Community's return on investment: "If the level of resources is raised, then the added-value must be clear for everyone," he said. Others believed that increasing the means given to the EU would inevitably "annoy some people" within the Member States: German Bundesrat Member Rainer Speer stressed that "Member States were already boosting funding for research or Lisbon Agenda-related goals" and that "everyone's role should be clear".

Lord Grenfell recalled that the nature of the budget will be up for scrutiny in 2008-09, when the revision of all revenue and spending will be considered (as agreed by governments during the December 2005 summit), "including the UK abatement and the CAP". Most speakers recognised that more resources would force a change in the nature of the EU budget, but fellow working group rapporteur Gunter Stumvoll, of the Austrian Nationalrat, wrapped up the debate by saying that "any reform would be hard to agree at Council level, so the effort to find a consensus should not be undermined".

EP President Josep Borrell indicated in his introduction to this two-day conference that a failure to look into the own resources system would lead to a situation where "no agreement will be found on the Financial Perspective after 2014".

The own resources system was created in 1970 to finance the EU budget and consists of four main instruments: funds from VAT, customs duties, agricultural levies and contributions from Member States, the so-called "Gross National Income resource", calculated according to their wealth. Over time, the GNI resource has grown to represent the main source of funding of the EU, with a direct impact on deficit-threatened national budgets.

08/05/2006

Joint Parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe

Working group on the "future financial resources of the Union"

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7845-128-05-19-901-20060503IPR07844-08-05-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm

Consensus sur le besoin de réformer le système des ressources propres

Députés européens et parlementaires nationaux se sont accordés pour reconnaître la nécessité de remplacer le système des ressources propres actuels par un mécanisme de financement du budget européen compréhensible par tous. Les opinions étaient partagées, en revanche, sur l'opportunité de lier ce nouveau système à l'impôt ainsi que sur la nature et les finalités du budget en tant que tel.

Le rapporteur du groupe de travail sur les futures ressources financières de l'UE, Lord Grenfell, de la Chambre des Lords, a expliqué que toute nouvelle forme de ressource propre devait être "envisagée avec circonspection": si cette nouvelle ressource était de nature fiscale, il faudrait absolument "entendre toutes les réticences" quant à la proposition. Les ressources propres ont été au centre des débats sur le financement du budget à long-terme de l'UE, les "Perspectives financières". Exempt de toute réforme depuis près de 20 ans, le système des ressources propres a été pointé par d'aucuns comme l'un des éléments qui avait entravé la conclusion de nouvelles Perspectives financières pour 2007-13.

L'impôt européen et le public

"Un impôt européen peut être difficilement justifié auprès des citoyens à ce stade et ne servirait certainement pas la cause de l'Union européenne", a estimé Christian Philip, membre de l'Assemblée nationale française. "Toute taxe devrait être compréhensible par tous", a ajouté Svend Auken, du Folketinget danois, "et dès lors tout le monde comprendrait que l'on prélève une partie des bénéfices réalisés par les grands groupes pétroliers". Helga Trüpel (Verts/ALE, DE), s'est aussi exprimée en faveur d'une taxe sur l'énergie, en complément du système des ressources propres actuel, qui ne "donnerait pas l'impression aux gens qu'ils doivent payer plus pour l'Union européenne".

L'un des principaux obstacles qui se dressent devant cette idée d'impôt européen est sans conteste la nécessité de dégager l'unanimité sur la question au Conseil, puisque cela suppose une harmonisation fiscale européenne complète, ce dont certains Etats membres ne veulent pas entendre parler. Le député national espagnol et ancien du PE, Carles Gasoliba, a mis en doute la possibilité de tomber d'accord sur une telle décision, vu les répercussions qu'elle engendrerait. "Une nouvelle forme de ressources propres basée sur l'impôt devrait être assortie d'un régime fiscal supranational, qui donnerait la garantie que l'argent est dépensé avec transparence et géré avec diligence", a souligné le parlementaire grec Ilias Kallioras.

Les imaginations se sont déchaînées pour trouver une nouvelle forme de ressource propre: les orateurs ont évoqué des taxes sur les vols aériens, sur les bénéfices des sociétés ou encore sur les "SMS" envoyés à partir des téléphones portables. A l'origine de cette idée, Alain Lamassoure, rapporteur du PE sur les ressources propres, pense également que le nouveau système devrait être lié directement aux bénéfices engendrés par l'Union européenne. Grâce au marché intérieur, les "échanges entre les pays ont explosé, donc tout le monde comprendrait si l'on prélevait du fruit de ces échanges une fraction pour financer l'UE", a soutenu M. Lamassoure.

La nature du budget

Pour Richard Corbett (PSE, UK), toute nouvelle modalité de financement de l'UE dépend d'une identification visible du retour sur investissement créé par

l'Europe: "Si l'on augmente le niveau des ressources, alors il faut que la valeur ajoutée soit claire pour tous". D'autres ont estimé qu'une augmentation des moyens mis à la disposition de l'UE "irriterait certains": Rainer Speer, membre du Bundesrat allemand, a souligné que les "Etats membres s'employaient déjà à renforcer le financement de la recherche et des autres objectifs liés à la stratégie de Lisbonne" et que dès lors le rôle de chacun "devait être clair".

Lord Grenfell a quant à lui rappelé que le budget de l'UE serait remis à plat en 2008-09, lorsque l'ensemble des entrées et sorties seraient examinées (tel que décidé par les chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement au Sommet européen de décembre 2005), "y compris le cheque britannique et la PAC". Plus de ressources engendreraient un changement de nature du budget, ont estimé la plupart des orateurs mais, comme la souligné en conclusion Gunter Stumvoll, du Nationalrat autrichien et co-président de ce groupe de travail, toute réforme serait "difficile à boucler au Conseil, et donc les efforts à déployer pour parvenir à un consensus ne devaient pas être sous-estimés".

A l'ouverture de cette rencontre de deux jours avec les Parlements nationaux, le Président du PE, Josep Borrell, a lancé une mise en garde: si on ne se penche pas sérieusement sur les ressources propres, cela engendrera une situation où "aucun accord ne pourra être conclu sur les Perspectives financières après 2014".

Le système des ressources propres a été créé en 1970 pour financer le budget communautaire et consiste en quatre grands instruments: les prélèvements agricoles, les droits de douane, la quote-part sur la TVA et les contributions des Etats membres, appelées "contributions revenu national brut", calculées proportionnellement à la richesse individuelle des pays de l'UE. Cette dernière est, avec le temps, devenue la principale source de financement du budget.

08/05/2006

Rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe

Groupe de travail sur les "futures ressources financières de l'UE"

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7845-128-05-19-901-20060503IPR07844-08-05-2006-2006-false/default_fr.htm

Pursuing the inter-parliamentary debate on the Future of Europe

There was a general consensus among the Members of national Parliaments and of the European Parliament at the first Joint Parliamentary meeting on the "Future of Europe", to continue meeting to further debate citizens' concerns.

"We are building a supranational democracy, which, for the European Parliament, implies working in close cooperation with national parliaments.

This first meeting showed the importance and necessity for increased parliamentary dialogue" said President Borrell opening the press conference after the morning session of the meeting. He added: "I am delighted the Finnish Presidency intends to continue the collaboration begun today with the Austrian Presidency, during a second forum in December, where we will have the occasion to continue and intensify our exchanges on the subjects which really matter to our citizens."

President Khol said: "We are pleased that this conference took place, enabling us - members of national parliaments and members of the European Parliament - to better work together. This is a step in the right direction for our future relations. I am delighted that the Finnish presidency intends to carry on in this vein. I am sure that the discussions we had together during these two days, will be useful for the debates we will hold in our national parliaments on the same issues."

Josep Borrell and Andreas Khol, who co-chaired the parliamentary meeting, agreed that national Parliaments must be more involved in the EU decision-making process, particularly when evaluating the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. President Khol said: "I also welcome the proposal by the President of the European Commission, in response to the conference on subsidiarity organised in April, to pass on directly to national parliaments all new European proposals and to invite us to react to those."

Both Presidents agreed that: "the philosopher's stone allowing us to find the perfect alternative solution to the Constitutional Treaty has not yet been discovered, but today's debates will be used to enter into the phase of refining the proposals."

Next Joint Parliamentary meeting in December

The Joint Parliamentary meeting came up with a concrete result as regards the debate on how the EU should be financed. Members of the European and national Parliaments agreed to set up a permanent working group to explore different options to finance EU policies.

During the morning, the speaker of the Finnish Parliament, Paavo Lipponen, proposed that "a similar conference be organised under the Finnish presidency, in Brussels, co-chaired by the Finnish Parliament and the EP" to pursue the debate. The idea of further inter-parliamentary discussions on the future of Europe was welcomed. Bronislaw Geremek (ALDE, PL) even suggested that "every year on 9 May we should organise such a debate".

Yves Bur, vice-President of the French National Assembly, stressed the need for closer cooperation between the European and national Parliamentarians to ensure respect of the subsidiarity principle. The President of the Danish Folketinget, Christian Mejdahl, agreed, stressing that more citizen participation is needed. Martin Schulz (PES, DE), speaking on behalf of his group said: "The deepening of the EU always means more parliamentary democracy" and a greater role for national Parliaments. Recalling the

Schuman plan, Hans Pöttering, leader of the EPP group, stressed the importance of promoting European values inside the Union and abroad and concluded: "We need to continue with passion and with patience."

Is the Constitution still alive?

Jo Leinen (PES, DE), Chairman of the committee on Constitutional Affairs, expressed his personal satisfaction on the 15th ratification of the Constitutional treaty by the Estonian Parliament today. Applauding the news, a majority of participants agreed that the draft Constitution should still be the basis for discussion of EU institutional reform, even after the 'no's' in the French and Dutch referenda. "One year after the referenda, we are divided, the budget is going down and we are going back to nationalism. We have got to take the constitutional text and see what should be saved and what should be deleted from it" said Monica Frassoni (Greens/EFA, IT). Manuel Huertas, on behalf of the Spanish national delegation, recalled that a majority of Member States (15) and the majority of European citizens supported the Treaty. Graham Watson (ALDE, UK), leader of the European liberals, said: "The European Union needs a constitution based on common values; we badly need a constitutional framework." Swedish MP Tuve Skånberg said that the Constitution is supported by a majority, but "there are criticisms and it is important to allow criticisms to be heard."

A few voices, including Portuguese MP Honorio Novo, said that "the Constitution is dead". For Jens-Peter Bonde, "a new Constitution for Europe should be drawn up bottom up instead of top down. We should not vote any text which has not been approved by the majority of the national parliaments." According to the vice-President of the Polish Sejm, Jaroslaw Kalinowski, "the Treaty should be made simpler and more understandable for Europeans." Francis Wurtz (GUE/NGL, FR) justified the rejection of the Treaty by saying: "Citizens have the feeling that the EU is not a solution to globalisation, but part of the problem".

In the afternoon, Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel defended the Constitution: "The constitution treaty is the most successful attempt we've had so far to build on the achievements of the past 50 years," he said. "The way things stand, I don't see a better option." Paving the way for a June Summit which will be dominated by talks on the deadlocked Treaty, Chancellor Schüssel also came up with daring new ideas, like a EU fire brigade, to show "that Europe is acting together", as part of a "roadmap for seven or eight projects with concrete timetables".

Enlargement: before or after reforms?

French MP Pierre Lequiller said the EU cannot expand further without reforms to improve efficiency. "We cannot continue to enlarge if we want to have a political EU." The vice-president of the Czech Senate, Jiri Liska, said: "The EU has to expand further, we cannot stop this trend. Romanian and Bulgarian accessions cannot be postponed and we have to proceed with Balkan countries' negotiations." The President of the Turkish Delegation to the

Council of Europe, Murat Mercan, emphasised the advantages of accepting Turkey's membership. "I think my country has a lot to contribute to enhance the EU capacity to influence world politics," he said. "Integrating Macedonia will be the least costly enlargement" explained Slobodan Casule, from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. He concluded: "The issue of the Western Balkans is not about enlargement, it is about reunifying Europe."

European Commission President José Manuel Barroso highlighted the need to stay in touch with citizens' concerns: "Enlargement has enriched Europe hugely and brought it new strength. But we must recognize some very real public concern, and show that Europe is not enlarging by default, but through our own deliberate choice", Barroso said.

The debate held yesterday and today in the EP will contribute to the discussions of the European Council on 15 and 16 June, which will draw initial conclusions on the reflection period. The decision to hold the next Joint Parliamentary meeting at the end of the year will be made on 30 June.

09/05/2006

Co-chaired by: Josep BORRELL FONTELLES (President of the European Parliament)

Andreas KHOL (President of the Austrian Nationalrat)

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/angles_de_vue_page/default/default_en.htm

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7847-129-05-19-901-20060503IPR07846-09-05-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm

PE et Parlements nationaux poursuivront le débat sur le Futur de l'Europe

Les participants de la première rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe sont unanimes: tant les membres des Parlements nationaux que les eurodéputés s'accordent pour reconnaître que ce genre de rencontre doit être réédité afin de se pencher sur les préoccupations des citoyens.

"Nous construisons une démocratie supranationale, ce qui suppose pour le Parlement européen de travailler en étroite collaboration avec les parlements nationaux. Cette première réunion a démontré l'importance et la nécessité d'un dialogue parlementaire accru", a déclaré le Président Borrell au lever de rideau de la conférence de presse qui a suivi les travaux de mardi matin. "Je me réjouis que la Présidence finlandaise ait l'intention de poursuivre la collaboration entamée aujourd'hui avec la Présidence Autrichienne au cours d'un second forum en décembre prochain, où nous aurons l'occasion de poursuivre et intensifier nos échanges sur les sujets qui importent réellement à nos citoyens", a-t-il ajouté.

Pour sa part, le Président Khol a déclaré: " Nous nous félicitons de la tenue de cette conférence qui nous permet de mieux travailler ensemble, parlementaires nationaux et parlementaires européens. C'est la bonne procédure pour le futur de nos relations. Je me réjouis de l'intention de la présidence finlandaise de poursuivre dans la voie que nous avons ouverte aujourd'hui. Je suis persuadée que les discussions que nous avons eues ensemble pendant ces deux jours, serviront aux débats que nous allons tenir dans nos parlements nationaux sur ces thèmes.

MM. Borrell et Khol, qui ont co-présidé la rencontre parlementaire, reconnaissent que les Parlements nationaux doivent être davantage impliqués dans la prise de décision communautaire, principalement quand il s'agit d'évaluer l'application des principes de subsidiarité et de proportionnalité. "Je me réjouis également des propositions du Président de la Commission Européenne, en réponse à la conférence sur la subsidiarité que nous avons organisée en avril, de transmettre directement aux parlements nationaux toutes nouvelles propositions européennes et nous invitant à réagir à ces dernières", a affirmé le Président Khol.

Les deux Présidents estiment enfin que "la pierre philosophale permettant de trouver la solution parfaite alternative au Traité constitutionnel n'a pas encore été découverte. Mais que les débats d'aujourd'hui serviront à entrer dans la phase de décantation des propositions."

Rendez-vous en décembre

La rencontre parlementaire a engendré une conclusion concrète sur le financement de l'UE: les membres du PE et des Parlements nationaux mettront sur pied un groupe de travail permanent pour évaluer les différentes possibilités de financement des politiques communautaires.

Au début des travaux du 9 mai, le président du Parlement finlandais, Paavo Lipponen, a proposé qu'une "rencontre similaire co-organisée par le Parlement finlandais et le PE ait lieu à Bruxelles à la fin de l'année", sous présidence finlandaise, afin de poursuivre les débats. L'opportunité d'approfondir les discussions sur l'avenir de l'Europe a été accueillie favorablement par Bronislaw Geremek (ADLE, PL), qui pense même qu'un tel événement devrait avoir lieu chaque année, à la même date du 9 mai.

Yves Bur, vice-président de l'Assemblée nationale française, a insisté sur le besoin de poursuivre la coopération étroite entre PE et Parlements nationaux afin de respecter le principe de subsidiarité. Le Président du Folketinget danois, Christian Mejdahl est du même avis, la participation citoyenne à ce genre de rencontre devant être renforcée. Martin Schulz (PSE, DE), s'exprimant au nom de son groupe, a ajouté: "l'UE, dans l'approfondissement de son action, a besoin de plus de démocratie parlementaire" et d'un rôle plus important pour les Parlements nationaux. Hans Gert Pöttering, président du groupe PPE-DE, veut quant à lui que les valeurs européennes soient promues dans tant à l'intérieur de l'UE que par-delà de ses frontières: "Nous devons continuer avec passion et patience".

La Constitution est-elle toujours en vie?

Jo Leinen (PSE, DE), président de la commission des affaires constitutionnelles du PE, s'est félicité personnellement que le Parlement estonien ait ratifié le traité constitutionnel ce 9 mai. Une majorité de participants pense que le texte de la Constitution doit servir de base aux discussions sur la réforme institutionnelle de l'UE, malgré le double "non" enregistré l'an dernier en France et aux Pays-Bas. "Un an après ces référendums, les parties sont divisées, le budget de l'UE a été revu à la baisse et le nationalisme remonte à la surface. Nous devons voir ce qui peut être conservé ou éliminé du texte du traité", pense Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE, IT). Manuel Huertas, du Parlement espagnol, a pour sa part rappelé qu'une majorité d'Etats membres (quinze avec l'Estonie) et de citoyens européens soutenaient la Constitution. Graham Watson (ADLE, UK), président des libéraux européens, abonde dans ce sens: "L'Union européenne a besoin d'une Constitution fondée sur des valeurs communes; nous avons grand besoin d'un cadre constitutionnel". Le député suédois Tuve Skånberg retient quant à lui que si la Constitution est soutenue par une majorité, il faut tout de même reconnaître que des "critiques à son égard existent, et qu'elles ne peuvent pas être ignorées".

Quelques voix se sont élevées pour dire que la "Constitution était morte", comme par exemple le député portugais Honorio Novo. Pour Jens-Peter Bonde (IND/DEM, DK), "une nouvelle Constitution pour l'Europe doit être conçue à partir de la base et non imposée d'en haut. Il ne faut pas accepter de texte qui n'ait pas recueilli le soutien de la majorité des Parlements nationaux". Selon le vice-président du Sejm polonais, Jaroslaw Kalinowski, "le traité doit être simplifié et rendu plus compréhensible". Francis Wurtz (GUE/NGL, FR) a justifié le non français à la Constitution en ces termes: "les citoyens ont le sentiment que l'UE n'est pas une solution à la mondialisation mais bien qu'elle contribue au problème".

Lors des travaux de l'après-midi, le Chancelier autrichien, Wolfgang Schüssel, a défendu la Constitution: "Ce traité est la tentative la plus fructueuse jamais réalisée de bâtir sur les succès de ces 50 dernières années", a-t-il déclaré. "Dans l'état actuel des choses, je ne vois pas de meilleure solution". Jetant les bases d'un Sommet de juin qui sera dominé par les débats sur l'impasse constitutionnelle, le Chancelier Schüssel a également lancé des idées inédites, comme la création d'une brigade de pompiers européens, afin de démontrer "l'action commune de l'EU", parmi une "série de sept ou huit projets assortis d'un calendrier concret".

L'élargissement: avant ou après les réformes?

Le député français Pierre Lequiller estime que l'UE ne peut pas poursuivre son élargissement sans les réformes qui s'imposent pour améliorer son efficacité: "l'élargissement ne peut continuer sans union politique". La vice-présidente du Sénat tchèque, Jiri Liska, a en revanche affirmé que l'UE "devait continuer à s'agrandir et que la tendance ne pouvait être renversée".

L'adhésion de la Roumanie et de la Bulgarie ne peut pas être repoussée, tandis que les négociations avec les pays des Balkans devaient être maintenues". Le président de la délégation turque, Murat Mercan, a mis en évidence les avantages de l'adhésion de son pays: "Je pense que la Turquie a beaucoup à apporter à l'UE pour accroître son importance sur la scène mondiale", a-t-il dit. "L'intégration de la Macédoine sera le plus indolore des élargissements", a expliqué Slobodan Casule, de l'ancienne république yougoslave de Macédoine, qui a ajouté: "Elargir l'UE aux Balkans occidentaux, c'est continuer la réunification européenne".

Enfin, le Président de la Commission européenne, José Manuel Barroso, pense qu'il faut rester en phase avec les préoccupations des citoyens à ce sujet: "L'élargissement a considérablement enrichi l'Europe et lui a apporté de nouvelles forces. Nous devons toutefois reconnaître la préoccupation réelle des gens et montrer que l'Europe ne se résume pas à un élargissement par défaut, mais constitue bien un choix mûrement délibéré".

La rencontre parlementaire organisée ces 8 et 9 mai au PE contribuera aux discussions du Conseil européen des 15 et 16 juin prochains, qui établira les conclusions préliminaires sur la "période de réflexion". La décision d'organiser une nouvelle rencontre de ce type à la fin de l'année interviendra le 30 juin.

09/05/2006

Réunion co-présidée par : Josep BORRELL FONTELLES (Président du Parlement européen)

Andreas KHOL (Président du Nationalrat autrichien)

Rencontre parlementaire sur le Futur de l'Europe

Les communiqués de presse en 20 langues sur cet événement seront publiés dans la rubrique "Angle de vue" (voir lien ci-dessous)

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/angles_de_vue_page/default/default_fr.htm

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/002-7847-129-05-19-901-20060503IPR07846-09-05-2006-2006-false/default_fr.htm



Press releases from the Austrian Parliament

Future of Europe/European integration

Khol and Roth-Halvax open conference in Brussels Parliamentary meeting on the future of Europe on 8 and 9 May

Brussels/Vienna (PK) – The two-day Conference on the Future of Europe was opened this afternoon in Brussels. In four working groups the meeting, organised jointly by the Austrian and European Parliament, will discuss the direction Europe should be taking. “The European integration process has faltered as an indirect result of the negative constitutional referendums in the Netherlands and France,” said National Council President Andreas Khol in his opening address. It was therefore important, he continued, for the elected national parliamentarians and the members of the European Parliament to meet to discuss the vital issues and to air their differing points of view. “This is the first step on a long journey,” said Khol, “but I am confident that we will be successful.”

Federal Council President Sissy Roth-Halvax reminded participants to bear in mind the subsidiarity principle and the Europe of regions in their discussions on the future of Europe.

The Conference host and President of the European Parliament Josep Borrell Fontelles welcomed the more than 250 parliamentarians from the Member States as well as representatives from the two candidate countries Romania and Bulgaria, and from Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey.

Borrell Fontelles pointed out that the Treaty of Nice had already been regarded as inadequate the day after its signature. The European Parliament had also stated that this Treaty did not offer a basis for the effective continuation of the integration process. The outcome of the referendums in France and the Netherlands had led Europe into an impasse and it was now a question of deciding whether the Constitution should enter into force, whether just parts of it should be implemented or whether it should be completely redrafted. Europe also faced considerable challenges and had to find answers to the problems of globalisation and international competition, threats to social standards, the ageing of the population, immigration, the supply of energy and terrorism. A sectoral policy and the mere implementation of projects was inadequate, said Borrell, since good policies also required good institutions. The year of reflection was now over and it was time for action. He hoped that the Conference would reactivate the European structuring process and

strengthen the confidence of citizens in Europe again. People had to be aware that Europe was not the problem but part of the solution, in all areas.

The Conference, which was attended by national and European parliamentarians, needed to look closely at the central issues connected with the European integration process, said National Council President Andreas Khol. It had to be made clear that the further development of the European Constitution was essential. There was also a need for discussion on the common foreign policy, the maintenance of the European economic and social model, security issues and financial resources.

Khol then reviewed the European constitutional process, which had started in 1956 with the statement by Adenauer and Schuman on the establishment of a European Coal and Steel Community. Looking back on events since that time, said Khol, it was not appropriate to talk about a crisis: fifty years was the “blink of an eyelid” in the history of the world. As a young student he could never have conceived of an integrated Europe with 25 countries – soon to be 27.

As far as the Constitution was concerned, time and patience were of the essence, he said. It was not a time for waiting and wallowing in the crisis but of doing everything possible to arrive at a Constitution. He was firmly convinced that the text was excellent and that it would not be easy to find a better one.

Khol suggested that every country should first put its own house in order. He warned against using Europe as a scapegoat for shortcomings at the national level. At the same time, the national parliaments could make a considerable contribution, both at the national level and through COSAC. He called on the European Commission to provide the national parliaments with comprehensive information about planned legislation. Both the Commission and the European Court of Justice needed to be aware of the heightened sensitivity of the population.

Europe was in a phase of reflection, said Federal Council President Sissy Roth-Halvax, that would provide important stimulus for project Europe. The national parliaments had an indispensable role as mediators between the demands and expectations of the population at the national and regional levels and their representatives at the European level. In the light of the failed constitutional referendums in particular, the method of communication was just as important as the resultant policies. Representatives of the national parliaments had a great responsibility to heighten European awareness among the citizenry at all levels, particularly the regional level. In that context, Roth-Halvax drew attention to the importance of fostering subsidiarity and Europe of regions. The Austrian Federal Council felt increasingly called upon to represent regional interests not only in the national decision-making process but also at the European level, as an indication that politics also took account of the will of the people. Europe of regions was the core of the integration process and should not be left out of consideration, she emphasised.

After the opening, the participants split into working groups to discuss the following items: “The European Union in the world and the limits of the Union”, “Globalisation and the European economic and social model”, “Prospects for the area of freedom, security and justice” and “The future financial resources of the Union”. Tomorrow, on Europe Day, the results of the working groups will be presented and discussed in the plenary session. In the afternoon, Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schäuble and Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso will speak.

Conference on the Future of Europe in Brussels Reports from the working groups

Brussels/Vienna (PK) – The Conference on the Future of Europe chaired by National Council President Andreas Khol and European Parliament President Josep Borrell Fontelles continued in the morning of 9 May, Europe Day, with the reports from the four working groups. The day before, these groups had discussed the topics “The European Union in the world and the limits of the Union”, “Globalisation and the European economic and social model”, “Prospects for the area of freedom, security and justice” and “The future financial resources of the Union”.

Roth: Involving parliaments in the CSFP

Michael Roth (SPD, member of the EU Committee of the German Bundestag) emphasised the vital importance of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as a means of strengthening the Union. The members of the working group, said Roth, were clearly in favour of enlargement, which would not only bring Europe together but would also be of benefit to everyone. The citizens had become wary, however, because they had not been given the opportunity to publicly discuss the prospects of enlargement. It was up to parliamentarians above all to explain the advantages of enlargement. The doors of the EU should be open to all European countries; this had been an essential element of the founding tradition. It was not only a question of applying the Copenhagen criteria, he said, but also whether the EU can cope with further partners. For that reason the EU needed to be consolidated so as to strengthen its bargaining position.

South-Eastern Europe, a region in which the EU had already failed once, was a special responsibility, said Roth. More than ever it was up to the EU to prove its solidarity with the countries of South-Eastern Europe and beyond. In that region of Europe, the EU needed to act as a stabilising anchor and help foster democracy and prosperity. Future accession negotiations, he said, would nevertheless call for a lot of patience and care.

Roth went on to speak of the Constitutional Treaty, which he saw as the key to a viable Europe. The foreign policy instruments and structures described in it in particular would help Europe. A strong economic union also needed a viable multilateral CFSP, but in that area the EU was not yet good enough. It

should finally speak and act with one voice; that was something that all Member States would profit from and it also provided a basis for more responsible globalisation. Of vital importance, said Roth, was the involvement of the national parliaments and the European Parliament in decisions relating to the CFSP. The intergovernmental approach was not the key to the future.

Karas: Safeguarding European social model and system of values

Othmar Karas (EVP, member of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee of the European Parliament) introduced his report by urging the national parliaments to work together more and calling for the implementation of the European social model and system of values in the EU Member States so that the EU could perform its role in the world and meet its obligations towards its citizens.

The future of the EU, he continued, depended on how globalisation and demographic developments were handled, on agreement on the areas that called for joint action and those that were the responsibility of the sovereign states, and finally on the determination of everyone to develop the EU into a democratic union capable of making decisions. Unemployment and globalisation made people anxious, he said, but globalisation was a reality that had to be faced up to. The advantages outweighed the disadvantages, but the EU had the task of establishing the conditions for stability and the maintenance of peace. Nationalism, populism and protectionism would not minimise the risk, underlined Karas. The single market and Lisbon strategy offered a suitable response to globalisation and the changes in the labour market. The Member States were responsible for implementing those strategies.

Globalisation did not mean lower wages and lower social standards but finding a balance between economic prosperity and social security and putting the European social model, the social market economy and solidarity into practice. There was a need for greater mobility and flexibility, said Karas, for better implementation of the Lisbon strategy and greater efforts in the area of research and development. "We must abolish protectionism and communicate with our citizens," he concluded.

Koskinen: Justice and internal affairs – progress through the EU Constitution

Johannes Koskinen (Social Democrat, member of the Grand Committee of the Eduskunta) emphasised the importance of the areas of justice and internal affairs for public acceptance of the EU. Specific measures were expected in that vital area, he said, pointing to the progress that the Constitutional Treaty had brought in that respect. It had abolished the pillar structure, strengthened parliament and ensured the respect of fundamental rights, while taking account of national sovereignty and legal structures. The two-pillar approach made decision-making more difficult, however, and the political will had also been absent on many occasions, he admitted. Nevertheless justice and

internal affairs policies had developed rapidly in recent years. The next milestone would be the mid-term review of the Hague Programme.

Even without the Constitutional Treaty there was potential for progress, said Koskinen. Although the working group had failed to reach a clear consensus, some guidelines had crystallised. More efficient decision-making through qualified majorities and the possible involvement of the ECJ and greater political will were required at all costs. Many MPs were in favour of the creation of an office of fundamental rights but the idea of a European public prosecutor was rejected by most. There had been agreement on the need to strengthen fundamental and civil rights and for more efficient collaboration between security forces. The immigration and asylum policy also required a comprehensive approach in which integration policy would play a key role. Alignment and harmonisation of criminal codes within the EU would also be useful and many participants spoke out in favour of a minimum standard for criminal procedure within the EU. The members of the working group thought that the European Arrest Warrant functioned very well but more transparency and quality were required in legislation, concluded Koskinen.

Grenfell: Review and modify the EU budget structure

Lord Grenfell (unaligned, chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee of the House of Lords) called for greater transparency and a more comprehensible EU finance system. "The current system is no longer adequate. We need to move away from horse trading," said the rapporteur of the fourth working group. The members of the working group had welcomed the agreement on the Financial Perspective, said Grenfell, but were not satisfied. Most had seen this agreement as a wasted opportunity of solving fundamental problems. The budget served national interests rather than those of the EU and it needed to take greater account of future enlargements.

There was thus a need for a far-reaching modification. The role of the European Parliament in drafting the budget was an essential one but the expenditure model needed to be reviewed. In particular the expenditure structure of the common agricultural policy should be reformed, with the possibility of co-financing, as well as rebates, as had been granted to Great Britain, for example. The expenditures on which the EU would concentrate in future also needed to be defined. At all events, said Grenfell, the EU's financial structure needed to be made more transparent.

As far as the Union's own resources were concerned, there had been differences of opinion within the working group. Some participants had been in favour of a European tax – a tax on aviation fuel or a business tax, for example – while others thought it would be better to develop the existing system. The participants were agreed, however, that there were too many political obstacles to financial autonomy by the EU. It would be vital to establish a solid foundation for the future. All Member States would benefit from a pooling of resources, concluded Grenfell.

Discussion on the future of Europe in Brussels Next parliamentary meeting under the Finnish Presidency

Brussels/Vienna (PK) – Following the presentation of the reports in the plenary session, the Conference continued with an in-depth discussion. There was basic agreement on the fact that interparliamentary dialogue had been very successful and should be continued. The President of the Finnish Parliament, Paavo Lipponen, announced that a similar conference would take place under the Finnish Presidency on 4 and 5 December. This proposal was expressly supported by National Council President Andreas Khol.

In the discussion following the reports from the working groups, the divergent positions by the participants became evident. Supporters of a “period of reflection” in connection with the European Constitution crossed rhetorical swords with opponents of any interruption. Some called for a new text because the old one was “legally dead”, while others defended the existing text and called for a continuation of the ratification process. The problem of enlargement versus deepening of the Union was brought up, as was the danger that parliaments would be dominated by state chancelleries. There was a risk of “distortion of the European project” and of a shift by the people of Europe from scepticism to indifference.

The chairman of the European People’s Party, Hans-Gert Pöttering, recalled that Europe had always been designed as a peace project. Democracy was a further vital pillar. The European Parliament had much more influence on legislation than in the past, but the democratisation process had to be continued, urged Pöttering. A unified Europe was also based on the principle of solidarity. In that context, Pöttering pointed out that the Polish Government, for example, which had called on the EU to show more commitment in the energy sector, should for its part also show solidarity and implement the constitutional principles. The Union also needed to be capable of acting, as that was the only way that Europe could pursue its interests and influence American policy, for example. Europe was not only an economic and monetary entity but also incorporated important values such as human rights, which needed to be defended.

Martin Schulz (Social Democratic party in the European Parliament) stressed that representatives of the national parliaments and the European Parliament and the national parliaments were not rivals but partners in the constitutional process, one of the most important aims of which was to strengthen the right of co-determination by parliaments and the European Parliament. One of the fundamental problems was the failure by the public to recognise the added value that the Constitutional Treaty would have brought in terms of efficiency, transparency and proximity. The identifying principle behind the Union – Europe as a peace project – was still valid. Europe did not replace national elements but supplemented them.

Graham Watson (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) asked where the EU stood eleven months after the start of the reflection phase. A number

of results had been achieved, but there was a need not only for dialogue but also a vision. There was still too little transparency in the procedures, and council meetings took place behind closed doors and tended to pursue national interests for the most part. A conference like the present one was therefore very important and should be followed up to bring politicians closer to their constituency members. In the light of globalisation, a European constitution was very important as a means of reacting to the new challenges. Europe was more than the sum of its parts. After 60 years of union, the French were still French, the Italians Italian and the Germans German. This was something that the public needed to know.

It was not just a time for formal speeches, said Monica Frassoni (Greens/Free European Alliance); the Parliament's proposals needed finally to be taken up. The Greens had never been of the opinion that the negative outcome of the constitution referendums represented a rejection of Europe. The opposite was true. Citizens wanted added value in terms of quality of life, employment, social standards, etc. This could not be achieved with the Treaty of Nice, said Frassoni. She firmly supported the strengthening of European institutions and for that reason the constitutional process needed to be continued. The people of Europe deserved a clear and understandable text, however.

Francis Wurtz (United European Left/Nordic Green Left) called for a critical analysis and procedure. The people of Europe demanded that the EU act as a counterweight to globalisation and that it produce answers to a number of problems. They had the feeling that Europe was not part of the solution but part of the problem. It was also insufficient merely to conduct an information campaign; there was a need for open dialogue on a new approach. It was not a case of bringing countries together but of unifying nations.

Jens Peter Bonde (Independence and Democracy) saw no point in reviving the "dead constitution". A new constitution needed to be drafted and alternatives developed. The new version should be discussed before the European elections and referendums held in all countries. Like previous speakers, he also believed that more transparent procedures were necessary. He suggested, for example, that the commissioners should visit the national parliaments and speak with the people. It might also be possible for the commissioners to be elected by the national parliaments so as to improve the lack of communication between Brussels and the citizenry.

Caspar Einem (SPÖ) regarded the conference as a great success in view of the importance of enabling national and international parliamentarians to enter into dialogue with one another. He expressly welcomed the proposal by Lipponen to continue this form of interparliamentary exchange. Regarding globalisation, it was not possible to keep telling the people what they should do or where they should tighten their belts. There was a need to establish the appropriate framework to enable people to become involved. He criticised the Lisbon strategy because the idea that Europe should be the best in all areas was in his opinion fundamentally wrong.

Johannes Voggenhuber (G/EFA) regarded the seating arrangement in national blocks as a dangerous sign of a return to nationalistic thinking. He pointed to the empty visitors' gallery and the lack of interest by the media and emphasised that Europe would not be able to find its identity in the "darkness of the state chancelleries" and intergovernmental talks but only through dialogue between parliaments; this was the only way of ensuring that Europe became a "res publica". It was not Europe's diversity that was threatened but its political unity.

Following the closure of the discussion by co-chairman EP President Josep Borrell Fontelles, a protest was lodged by the unaligned members of the European Parliament who had not had an opportunity to take the floor. Borrell pointed out that in calling up speakers he had relied on the lists made by independent officials. The conference will continue this afternoon with a speech by Council President Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schäuble.

Khol: The European Constitution requires time
Borrell: Developing supranational democracy at all levels

Brussels/Vienna (PK) – "The European Constitution requires time" said National Council President Andreas Khol today at a press conference during the Conference on the Future of Europe in Brussels today. "The philosopher's stone has not yet been found. We must continue to work and seek." The Conference to date had clearly shown, however, that an overwhelming majority of parliamentarians were of the opinion that the EU Constitution would make things considerably easier, he said.

The topic would at all events be on the agenda of the summit meeting on 15 and 16 June. Prior to that there would be a brainstorming session by foreign ministers at an informal meeting on 27 and 28 May. Even if no conclusions were reached, said Khol, it would not be a tragedy. He called for more self-awareness: Europe was on the right path and if the philosopher's stone were not found in June, they would just keep looking.

President Josep Borrell Fontelles also said that the reflection process should not be regarded critically. The investigation at present was focused on what would be possible in the future. Like President Khol he was satisfied to note that most participants had spoken in favour of retaining the current text of the Constitution as the basis for future developments.

Both Presidents agreed that the cooperation between the European Parliament and the national parliaments should be intensified. "We must cooperate more closely and continuously," they said. The Austrian Presidency had devised a formula with Finland, the next President, for expert conferences to be held in future during every Presidency. Khol then reviewed the conference on the Lisbon strategy in January and the subsidiarity conference in St. Pölten, which he regarded as having had a positive outcome. He hoped that the joint initiatives would also be continued by Germany.

“We are attempting to build up a supranational democracy on different levels,” added Borrell. An important step in that direction, said Khol and Borrell, was the efforts on the basis of the Treaty of Amsterdam to involve national parliaments earlier in the European legislative process so as to verify that the laws proposed by the Commission were compatible with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles and did not encroach on the authority of parliaments.

Schüssel: The European Union is not a zero option Schüssel and Barroso at the Conference on the Future of Europe in Brussels

Brussels/Vienna (PK) – The European Union is not a zero option but offers a win-win situation both for those giving assistance and for those receiving it, said EU Council President Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel today in his speech during the Conference on the Future of Europe in the European Parliament in Brussels. Commission President José Manuel Barroso, who spoke after Schüssel, announced that the Commission would make all new proposals and consultation papers available to the national parliaments so as to involve them more in the policy-forming process. National Council President Andreas Khol, co-chairman of the Conference with EP President Borrell, thanked the President of the Commission explicitly after his speech to the accompaniment of applause by the participants.

Schüssel: The “European content” must be better presented

EU Council President Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, alluding to the euro barometer and the 150th anniversary of the birth of Freud, said that the citizens of Europe felt a split relationship towards Europe. While 67 per cent regarded Europe as being democratic, modern and peaceful and wished for more of the same, around 40 per cent were of the view that Europe was not developing in the right direction. Schüssel described 2005 as a “disastrous year for the mood of Europe”: first, there had been the setbacks to the Constitutional Treaty as a result of the referendums in France and the Netherlands, and then public opinion had also followed suit. The citizens were not convinced of the “added value of Europe”: top-down processes were no longer functioning and specific bottom-up projects were required.

The Federal Chancellor then turned to the contributions made by the Austrian Council Presidency during the discussion following the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands. With its logo for the Presidency, reflecting the variety and diversity in Europe, Austria set a symbol. Schüssel mentioned the “Sound of Europe” event in Salzburg and the results of the recent subsidiarity conference in St. Pölten: that the countries and regions were vital to dialogue with citizens; that the Commission should work closely with the Council and national parliaments; and that a subsidiarity test would be applied to new projects.

As far as the Financial Perspective and the service directive were concerned, the cooperation between institutions had already proved effective, said Schüssel. He also thought that the Constitutional Treaty worked and that if anyone thought otherwise they should come up with better ideas. He announced a road map for the June EU summit for regaining the public confidence in the EU process. One issue in that respect would be civil crisis management, particularly in view of the fact that national crisis management was often overtaxed when it came to natural disasters or terrorist attacks. A study with recommendations would be completed in time for the Council meeting, said Schüssel.

With regard to the European Constitutional Treaty, all the results should be taken into account and not just the negative referendums. Once the ratification in Finland had been completed, 16 Member States would have ratified the Treaty; two countries had rejected it by referendum; and seven countries had suspended the ratification process. There was a need to improve the presentation not only of the process but also of the contents, including the fundamental rights and right to freedom, the commitment to equal treatment and non-discrimination, full employment and a social market economy and legally enforceable social rights.

Austria supported the further enlargement of the European Union, said Schüssel, and ongoing enlargement negotiations would of course continue. The absorption capacity of the Union had to be taken into account, however. Explicitly he called for a revival of the Constitutional Treaty, saying that 2008 would be a key year in that respect and also regarding institutional reform.

The role of the EU as a global player had been enhanced through an increase in the budget for the Common Foreign and Security Policy to 300 million Euros. The development of the neighbourhood policy would be important in that respect, also as a separate issue to the accession policy. Europe was a “not only but also”, in which a balance of priorities was essential, concluded Schüssel.

Barroso: We need more not less Europe

Europe Day today was an appropriate occasion to consider Europe’s future agenda and the European Parliament was the ideal place, said European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, who took the floor immediately after Federal Chancellor Schüssel. He recalled that the Constitutional Treaty had grown out of the European Convention, to which parliamentarians had also contributed. The question to be addressed was whether Europe should allow itself to be paralysed by two negative referendums. Referring to “plan D”, he said that changes were necessary to ensure that the Union functioned properly, and “plan D” would be very useful in that respect. The top priority for the public was not institutional questions, however, but issues such as pensions, jobs and maintaining a standard of living. Concrete results were now needed to reconcile Europe’s citizens with the European idea. “We need more Europe not less,” said Barroso, and a European response to

globalisation had to be found, otherwise Europe would sink into “global irrelevance”.

The Commission President then described the particular challenges on Europe’s future agenda: environmental risks, terrorism, chronic underdevelopment in parts of the world, and energy policy. Europe as a unity was stronger than national policies, even those of the most powerful members of the Union, said Barroso emphatically. He called for a stronger response to public concerns and concentration on main targets. Enlargement had enriched Europe but was not a matter of course. There was a need for consensus on the objectives for Europe, and Europe needed support from all partners at all levels. Barroso called for greater commitment by political actors, more transparency by European institutions and accountability and subsidiarity.

“The EU is there to serve its citizens,” he said. The Commission would step up its political commitment to national parliaments, he announced, pointing out that he had already started paying visits to national parliaments and would continue with a visit to the Austrian Parliament in the coming week. Strong institutions were important, but so were strong leaders who could put the ideas of freedom, democracy and the rule of law into practice, he concluded.

Schüssel and Barroso in dialogue with parliamentarians in the European Parliament Discussion on enlargement, budget and Constitutional Treaty in Brussels

Brussels/Vienna (PK) - In the subsequent discussion, Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel and Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso answered questions from the floor, which touched on enlargement, the Constitutional Treaty, the EU budget, employment, Schengen borders and the integration of the Western Balkans.

Referring to EU enlargement, Schüssel said that the process would be continued. Romania and Bulgaria would soon be members and negotiations had been started with Croatia and Turkey. Beforehand, however, there was a need to define the criteria for assessing the EU’s absorption capability. The enlargement must have a solid basis, as it was in no one’s interest to create a “new OSCE”. Replying to a question from Marianne Hagenhofer (SPÖ) on the employment situation in the EU, he said that a historical decision had been adopted the previous week in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) to inform the Commission in future of all major investment projects so as to prevent the shifting of jobs from one Member State to another.

Turning to the EU budget, Schüssel explained that the Union needed a better source of own resources. A number of proposals had already been submitted

and he trusted that the Commission would select the best one. It should not be forgotten, however, that the EU already had a good foundation for “future outlays”, with both research funds (70 per cent up on the previous period) and infrastructure resources (100 per cent rise) having been considerably increased.

On the subject of the Constitutional Treaty, Schüssel said that no final consensus had been reached on a “final brick”. As part of a bottom-up process, the attempt was currently being made to devise concrete proposals for each major problem (e.g. lack of contact with citizens, over-regulation) within a defined timeframe. A decision on the text of the Constitution would be made when this process was complete, probably in late 2007/ early 2008.

Commission President José Manuel Barroso expressed his thanks for the support for the Commission’s proposal on security. He believed that the public wanted a coordinated and joint approach. Terrorism was a global threat and joint efforts were needed to combat it. Regarding the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, he stated that the Commission would make its decision on 16 May. There were three possibilities: agreement to accession at the beginning of 2007, rejection because countries were not yet ready, or conditional agreement. The previous enlargement round had been a resounding success with positive effects for both the old and the new Member States. The public, however, was not really aware of this and needed to be persuaded by rational arguments and evidence.

In response to a question by Roderich Regler (ÖVP) on protecting the Schengen borders and the integration of the Western Balkans, Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel said that membership of Schengen depended on the progress made in the individual countries. He had the impression that they were working very professionally and that countries were gradually converging in this area. Regarding the Western Balkans, he also believed that the countries should not be regarded as a homogeneous group. Their problems were diverse and there were enormous differences in development. Every country had a European perspective but needed to go its own way.

In the subsequent discussion MEP Hannes Swoboda called for greater emphasis in the reflection phase on the European Economic and Social Model. Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel emphasised his unconditional support for the European social model.

Werner Fasslabend (ÖVP) expressed his extreme satisfaction with the course and results of the Conference. A clear consensus had crystallised for him from the discussion that Europe needed its own financing. He further mentioned the need to offer countries that were not yet members of the EU assistance and a European perspective at a level beneath full membership, so as to prevent an all-or-nothing decision. Fasslabend also welcomed the announcement by the President of the European Commission of the Commission’s intention to put the subsidiarity process, i.e. timely information to national parliaments on planned legislation, into practice. He said he would report on this at the upcoming COSAC meeting on 22 and 23 May.

Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schäussel also pointed to the subsidiarity process as an important result of the Conference, which had built on the subsidiarity conference in St. Pölten. This inter-institutional agreement had to be managed skilfully and professionally, he said.

Regarding the enlargement process, he said that before any further admission to the EU, not only the border problems and the identity of the applicant countries but also and above all the financial questions had to be cleared up.

“The Union needs positive results,” said Commission President José Manuel Barroso. The Commission would make concrete political proposals the following day, he announced. Important aspects in that respect were the creation of jobs and more economic growth, which were vital to public wellbeing, and also more transparency, democracy and subsidiarity.

Khol welcomes the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe Greater involvement of parliaments in EU lawmaking

Brussels/Vienna (PK) – National Council President Andreas Khol und President of the European Parliament Josep Borrell Fontelles were optimistic about the result of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The new arrangement for an exchange of views between the European Parliament and the national parliaments had been generally welcomed, said Khol. Consultation on the future of Europe had been most fruitful, he continued, and he would call for regular meetings of this type at the forthcoming Conference of Presidents of Parliament in Copenhagen.

Khol expressed his extreme satisfaction that the proposal for dealing with the subsidiarity verification process on the basis of the Treaty of Amsterdam had been supported by Commission President Barroso and that Federal Chancellor Schäussel would be putting it on the agenda of the European Council meeting in June. “This procedure will involve plenty of work for the European affairs committees,” said Khol.

He continued by praising the working groups for their extremely important proposals for further discussion on the future of Europe.

All of the discussion had been characterised by a positive assessment of the Constitutional Treaty. A large majority of participants had confirmed that it would represent a great step forward for the Union. President Josep Borrell Fontelles also believed that the text of the Constitution offered a good basis for the more efficient structuring of the Union.

Borrell called for a continuation of the dialogue between the European Parliament and the national parliaments in the present form. The discussion of the previous two days had been particularly fruitful. National parliaments and

the European Parliament had to work together to build up the Union based on the joint will of its citizens. "We bear joint responsibility," said Borrell in conclusion

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