

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

H.E. Mr. Jaime Gama
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Portuguese Republic

Riga, 14 February 2000

Excellency,

Referring to your letter of January 2000 on the Intergovernmental Conference for revision of the Treaty on European Union, it is my pleasure to express the first reflections on the issues of the Intergovernmental Conference.

We consider that the convocation of the Intergovernmental Conference on institutional reform in 2000 serves as a confirmation of the consistent support of the EU Member States for the development and enlargement of the European Union.

The results of the IGC must provide the European Union with institutional provisions allowing the applicant countries to accede to the EU without the necessity to review the Treatise in the next couple of years. Such a result of the institutional reform would ensure that the term of the accession of the applicant countries depends solely on the procedure for the accession set out in the Treaty on European Union and not on the internal reforms of the Union.

Latvia attaches great importance to the Helsinki decision concerning the time frame of the IGC operation. It is envisaged that the conference will conclude its work by December 2000. The observance of this deadline is a condition for the possibility of completing the accession negotiations, including the institutional provisions of the accession, thus ensuring that the accession of the new Member States is not hampered.

We support the Helsinki European Council decision to include three main issues in the agenda of the IGC: the size and composition of the Commission, the weighting of votes in the Council and the possible extension of qualified majority voting in the Council. Introduction of other issues in the IGC agenda has to be evaluated, taking into account whether they facilitate a solution of the three main issues.

Latvia is building up its position considering that the solutions of the IGC issues have to be based on two main principles: to facilitate the efficiency of the EU institutions and to ensure the equal status of the Member States.

The size and composition of the Commission We consider that each Member State ought to have the right to nominate one Commissioner. All Commissioners should have equal status regardless of the state that has nominated them. Equal participation of all Member States in the formation of the Commission is also a very important aspect to ensure its legitimacy in the society. This issue will gain a special significance in the new Member States. The possible negative impact of the size of the enlarged EU Commission on the efficiency of the Commission's work has to be considered and evaluated.

The weighting of votes in the Council Latvia is of the opinion that the voting system has to be simple and transparent. The essence of the current mutual balance among the Member States should be retained.

The possible extension of qualified majority voting in the Council We consider that there should be an extension of the application of this decision-making procedure. Unanimity should remain, for example, in the decisions of a constitutional nature. Considering the possible extension of the application of qualified majority voting, the significance of this procedure in promotion of integration has to be taken into account.

As the issues of the IGC will be discussed and the best solutions discovered during the course of the Conference, the opinion of Latvia will be further developed. Therefore we are interested in an effective exchange of information and opinions during the entire operation of the IGC.

Dear Mr. Gama, I sincerely wish you success in this difficult and very important task for the development of the European Union.

Yours faithfully

Indulis Bērziņš
Minister of Foreign Affairs