

EUROPEAN CONVENTION AND FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

"The role of civil society in the process of the EU reform"

Center Evropa (Dalmatinova 4, Ljubljana), Wednesday 12th February 2003, at 16:00

In the framework of the ongoing project "*The Future of Europe - our opinion counts*" the **Young European Federalists** of Slovenia (JEF SLO) have organized a public debate on the work and role of the European Convention and the Slovenian Forum on the future of Europe. The debate was held in the pleasant atmosphere of the newly built Auditorium in Center Evropa, the info point of the Delegation of the European Commission in Slovenia. The invited speakers were: **Mr. Lojze Peterle**, member of the presidium of the Convention and the president of the Commission for European affairs in the Slovenian parliament; **Dr. Thomas Kaufmann**, deputy of the head of the Delegation of the European Commission in Slovenia; and **Dr. Zlatko Šabič**, member of the Slovenian Forum on the future of Europe and professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. Through their short introductions they presented to the audience their views on the work, the accomplishments and expectations of the Convention and Forum.

Mr. Peterle firstly presented the purpose and the set goals of the Convention. He



stressed that one of the primary objectives of the Convention is to bring the EU institutions closer to the citizens. For this reason the participation of the civil society in the Convention is of extreme importance. According to Peterle the strength of the Convention lies in its legitimacy, since its members represent not only the EU institutions, but also its citizens and the future member-states. Therefore he expects that the decisions taken by the Convention will be respected by the upcoming intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Peterle also mentioned the reactions of the members of the Convention to the recent Franco-German proposal and the difficulties the Convention is meeting when trying to set up guidelines of the future Common Foreign and Security Policy. In his view the Convention will not produce a radical step forward, but will maintain the current balance between the intergovernmental and communitarian approach.

Mr. Kaufmann explained the standpoints of the European Commission on all important issues dealt by the Convention. Overall the Commission is obviously a strong proponent of the so-called communitarian vision, meaning strengthening the powers of the Commission vis-à-vis other intergovernmental organs of the EU. Among these he pointed out the exclusive right of initiative in the legislative procedure, mergence of the existing three pillars into one, increased co-operation between the members of the Euro-zone, non-approval of the Franco-German proposal regarding the establishment of the permanent president of the European Council and the merger of the two functions of the High Commissioner and the Commissioner into a new institution - the Secretary of the EU. The Commission holds the opinion that passing these measures would lead a way to a more democratic and efficient EU.

Dr. Šabič concentrated his presentation on the work of the **Slovenian Forum on the future of Europe** (on-line: <http://evropa.gov.si/aktualno/teme/2002-02-27/forum/>), in which representatives of various parts of the civil society (Universities, Unions and NGOs, including JEF SLO) meet on a regular basis. According to Šabič, there is a lot of interest for discussion about the EU in Slovenia - the number of those interested in participating in the debate by far exceeded the number of available places in the Forum. He also pointed out that it is a privilege to have such Forum and profit from it, since not all candidate countries organised it (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic). Furthermore, he stressed that the idea of the Forum is to debate and discuss and not to preoccupy itself with the realisation of the given proposals (e.g. there was a very fruitful discussion on the preservation of the national identity). In his conclusion he mentioned the insufficient media coverage of the Forum and expressed his regrets that the internet Forum is not being well visited and used. He also emphasized that the public can not expect that the Forum tackles and solves all the questions regarding the future of EU. It is the role of round tables, panels, workshops etc. like ours to build up the debate and involve general public. The debate that followed confirmed his view, it is up to everyone to contribute and up to everyone to elaborate his/her own views.

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