Preparation for the informal European Council meeting in Lisbon (18-19 October 2007)

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The Portuguese Presidency presented to MEPs the challenges of the informal European summit which should focus its work on the draft Reform Treaty.

Council: the Presidency stated that the results of the work carried out by the legal experts of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) were very positive. It recalled that the objective was to reach an agreement at the Lisbon Summit on 18 and 19 October. It also addressed the important issue of the composition of the European Parliament. Lastly, it announced the launch of a debate on the revised Lisbon Strategy in the preparation of the spring summit of 2008. This debate will be based on a communication from the Commission taking into account the context of globalisation.

Commission: as regards the IGC, the Commission welcomed the status granted by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and European perspectives for the future, although many challenges remain to be identified. It regretted the British and Polish "opt-outs", but felt they were part of the inherent nature of a compromise. On globalisation, the Commission stressed the need to reconcile economic efficiency and social protection. It opposed any retreat on social, health and environmental standards and ruled in favour of sustainable growth. It also criticised protectionism and called for the development of the Lisbon strategy which is only now beginning to show results.

The three representatives in the Intergovernmental Conference made the following comments:

- **Elmar Brok (EPP-ED, DE)** recognised that theexcellentcooperation between the German and Portuguese Presidencies resulted in a clear text that would meet the new challenges such as climate change, energy security, terrorism and foreign and security policy. He welcomed the extension of codecision and the abolition of the third pillar, stressing that the democratic deficit was thus closed. He also focused on Parliament’s involvement in the procedure of appointing the future High Representative.
- **Enrique Barón Crespo (PES, ES)** welcomed the fact that many advances towards democracy that were contained in the draft Constitution have been included in the Treaty. He emphasised the willingness of members, beyond their differences, to see progress in Europe and acknowledged their commitment to citizenship. He also expressed the wish for the Charter of Fundamental Rights to become legally binding.
- **Andrew Duff (ALDE, UK)** agrees that a political agreement is probable at the IGC in Lisbon. However, he expressed concern at the emergence of a self-service Europe propelled principally by the British demands for the opt-outs in the field of justice and interior affairs and fundamental rights. He called for a British domestic debate about why British citizens ought to be excluded from the benefits of integration inside all these important fields. He called on the Portuguese Presidency to press the UK into supporting the European Parliament’s position.

The positions expressed by the different political groups may be summarised as follows:

- **EPP-ED**: the Group’s Chairman stated that only a strong and united EU can legitimately influence world affairs. He called for effective European institutions capable of making decisions in respect of democracy, transparency and subsidiarity. Citizens expect Europe to act where it can make a difference, namely in the areas of climate, energy, immigration, innovation and the fight against terrorism.
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- **PES**: calling on Member States to focus on the essentials, the Group's President said that the EU represented only 8% of the world's population and should be united on the international scene. Affirming that his group would not accept any agreement other than the mandate given to the IGC in June in Brussels, he warned that failure would mean the end of the Europe Union in its present form and also warned against renationalisation.
- **ALDE**: the Group leader stressed the need for further efforts to avoid failure and achieve a Treaty for a strong efficient Europe. Critical of Council unanimity, he felt that, faced with the challenges ahead, the Treaty will strengthen Parliament's powers and increase transparency, although it is not satisfactory on all points. While it is possible to accept the renunciation of symbols, the fate of the Charter of Fundamental Rights remains questionable. The same goes for the exemptions (British and Polish opt outs) which should not be maintained.
- **UEN**: the representative of the Group expressed concern about the Charter of Fundamental Rights. He called for better instruments to scrutinise the EU's legislative process.
- **Greens/EFA**: expressing serious criticism of the draft Treaty, the Group's representative said the discussions did not involve any participation of the EU citizens, which put the issue of transparency to question. She strongly criticised the compromise reached by the Member States and deplored the fact that some members exaggerated the scenario whereby the Treaty is not adopted. She called for the EU to be more credible and responsible in the eyes of the citizen.
- **GUE/NGL**: the Group leader opposed the draft Treaty for the simple reason that none of his basic criticisms were taken into consideration. He then strongly criticized Article 24 of the Treaty on the protection of citizens with regard to the processing of personal data: the legislative procedure that would apply would not be the same depending on whether these data were being processed within the EU or sent to a third country. In the former case, Parliament would have full competence, but in the latter it would have no say at all, which would be a serious denial of democracy.
- **IND/DEM**: the Group deplored the fact that it was not involved in the discussions. He lambasted the illegibility of the text and stated that it was in favour of a new referendum.
- **ITS**: judging the reform process undemocratic, the Group representative was against the idea of transferring decision-making on immigration to European level.
- **NI**: the member who spoke said that the text was in actual fact identical to the Constitution but with a different name. Therefore disguised as a means to avoid a referendum. and that it was a disguised means of avoiding a referendum.

Concluding the debate, the Council Presidency stated that the various concerns and criticisms expressed would be taken into consideration at the political debate that would follow. It hoped that the Union would soon have a new Treaty.