Amendment of the Treaty on European Union: convening an intergovernmental conference under art. N of the TUE

1996/2013(COS) - 13/03/1996

In outlining the main aims of the report, Mrs Dury (PSE, B) included: the assessment of the findings of the Westendorp reflection group (where she emphasised the contribution made by the parliamentary observers), the completion and 'humanisation' of the Martin/Bourlanges report and the definition of Parliament's political priorities. By way of example, she cited competition law, which sometimes came into conflict with the notion of public service, the convergence criteria for EMU, which failed to take account of employment problems, and environmental policy, which had been the subject of a unanimous vote in the Council. As regards the reforms that the IGC was being called upon to introduce, Mrs Dury referred to a specific chapter on employment, the inclusion in the Treaties of basic social rights, the drafting of a European charter on public services and the promotion of balanced and sustainable development (including the needs of the most remote regions). Mrs Maij-Weggen (EPP, NL), the co-rapporteur, wanted to see some real content given to Community citizenship by grouping together all the laws (including protection from discrimination) in one single chapter; she also wanted to redress the lack of transparency by including the right of information in the Treaty and by publicising Council meetings; in addition, she called for the wider introduction of qualified majority voting in order to promote efficiency and democracy and also wanted to see the codecision process applied to a wider range of topics; she then called for the members of the Commission to be nominated by Parliament. In the job sector the campaign to reduce unemployment had to become a common thread that would run through all the other joint policies. Finally, she called for the WEU to be incorporated into the European Union. Mrs Agnelli, speaking for the Presidency-in-Office of the Council, assured Parliament that the latter was willing to become involved in the process of revising the Treaties. Stating that she sensed a new spirit of concordance among the participants at the conference, Mrs Agnelli then spoke of the two parallel challenges facing the Union: the first of these was the need for consolidation, which would for example help solve the problems stemming from the global economy (hence the strategies aimed at combating unemployment), and the second was European enlargement, as a moral imperative and objective necessity. On an internal level, she called for improvements to the strategic fight against criminality and drug abuse and for faster progress towards the free movement of persons and the 'communitisation' of problems such as immigration and the right of asylum. On an institutional level, there was a need to simplify the procedures (assent, codecision and consultation) and to adopt qualified majority voting as the rule. The make-up of the Commission had to be improved and all outdated standards removed from European legislation. Finally, according to Mrs Agnelli, the common foreign and security policy had to 'arouse a wider patriotic sentiment'. Commission President Santer pointed to the consensus of views between the Commission and Parliament on the importance of putting issues such as citizenship and employment at the centre of future treaties. Looking at the European Union as a political project, Mr Santer referred to a number of priority areas for future Community action: environment, research and economic and social cohesion. As far as external affairs were concerned, Parliament's suggestion for the special appointment of a Commissioner with responsibility for the CFSP could have negative consequences for the collective responsibility of the Commission. However, on an institutional level he agreed with the proposals for the simplification of procedures and the general recourse to qualified majority voting. The Commission was also in agreement with the idea of one Commissioner for each Member State, but could not rule out a review of this matter when the number of Member States reached a certain level. Finally, the Commission was keen to see Parliament's effectively participating in the IGC.