Preparing the next intergovernmental Conference for the year 2000

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The committee adopted a report by Giorgos DIMITRAKOPOULOS (EPP/ED, GR) and Jo LEINEN (PES, D) on the preparation of the reform of the Treaties and the next Intergovernmental Conference. The basic assumption underlying the report was that the next round of EU reforms must strengthen the institutions and make them more efficient, transparent and democratic in order to boost the EU's legitimacy in the eyes of the public and enable it to cope with enlargement. The report is firmly in favour of expanding the IGC's remit, arguing that it must not be limited to the institutional issues left unresolved at Amsterdam (i.e. the composition of the Commission, the weighting of votes within the Council and wider use of qualified majority voting). The prospect of an enlarged Union means that a constitutional process must be launched, involving the simplification and reorganisation of the Treaties to make them more intelligible to the public. The report argues that qualified majority voting and codecision should become the normal legislative decision-making method in the Community. Unanimity should be reserved for matters of a constitutional nature. The report also stresses the need for the weighting of votes in Council and the composition of the Commission to be reviewed. In addition, the report calls for Council meetings at which legislative decisions are taken to be open to the public. It also calls for Parliament to be given the same right as the Council to apply to the Court of Justice for the compulsory retirement of a Commissioner from office. The IGC should include in the Treaties provisions entitling the President of the Commission to fire a member of the Commission and also to ask Parliament for a vote of confidence. The Commission should retain its monopoly right of initiative in the first pillar, while Parliament's role must be strengthened in the areas of the budget and of appointments to EU institutions and bodies. In the field of external relations, the report calls inter alia for the integration of the WEU into the EU. Due account must be taken of the institutional problems posed by this integration, as well as the position of neutral states. To ensure increased transparency and greater democratic scrutiny, the report proposes that a "Community method" be used to prepare the reforms as well as in the reform proceedings themselves. In parallel, it states that consultation with national parliaments is essential in the preparations for the IGC, as is an open dialogue with the parliaments of the candidate countries and civil society organisations. Lastly, the report calls for Parliament to be fully involved at all stages of the IGC, arguing that its two representatives should take part in every stage of the proceedings. The final decision of the Member States should be submitted to Parliament, on the lines of the assent procedure.