

Intergovernmental Conference IGC: revision of the Treaties, the financial interests and the European Prosecutor

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The committee adopted the report by Giorgos DIMITRAKOPOULOS (EPP/ED, GR) and Jo LEINEN (PES, D) containing Parliament's practical proposals for the intergovernmental conference (IGC). The report was based on a clear principle: the composition, functioning and balance of the Union's institutions (Parliament, Council and Commission) must reflect its "dual legitimacy" both as a union of peoples and as a union of states, as represented by the European Parliament and the Council respectively. In the light of this, the report covered a range of institutional matters regarded by MEPs as crucial if the Union was to function more efficiently and democratically. The committee advocated extending the use of qualified majority voting in Council to all legislative decisions and said that all matters decided by qualified majority in Council should come under the Parliament /Council codecision procedure. The unanimity requirement in Council should be limited to decisions of a constitutional nature. Parliament should, under the assent procedure, take part in the procedure for revising the treaties and this procedure should also be used for all international agreements relating to areas for which the codecision procedure was used internally. With regard to the weighting of votes in Council, the report said that Council measures requiring a qualified majority should be adopted if they secured the support of at least a simple majority of members representing at least the majority of the total population of the Member States of the Union (a "double majority"). Regarding the composition of the Commission, the committee opted for a two-stage solution: in the period 2005-2010 the Commission would be made up of one Commissioner per Member State; from 2010 it would consist of its President plus 20 other Commissioners. As to the procedure for appointing the Commission, the report proposed that Parliament should elect the President from among candidates put forward by the Council; the Commission President, in consultation with the Member States, should then appoint the other members of the Commission, ensuring that from 2010 it included a citizen of each Member State at least every other term of office. The report sought to safeguard the independence and the role of the Commission while strengthening the political role of the President. Thus, it wanted the President of the Commission, after deliberation by the College of Commissioners, to be able to ask the European Parliament for a vote of confidence; if a majority of MEPs refused to grant the vote of confidence, the Commission would have to resign. If, as a result of serious errors committed in the course of his/her duties, any Commissioner was asked by the President to resign, he/she would have to do so. In addition, Parliament should have the right to ask the Court of Justice to compulsorily retire any member of the Commission under Article 216 of the Treaty. As regards the composition of Parliament, the report proposed that the number of Members should remain subject to an upper limit of 700 and suggested practical procedures for allowing for this even after enlargement. The report also called on the IGC to incorporate the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights into the Treaty so as to give it binding legal force, and to take steps to have the Union sign up to the European Convention on Human Rights. The IGC should also ensure that any person protected under the terms of the Charter was entitled to bring an action before the EU Court of Justice. Lastly, the report put forward specific proposals for simplifying and constitutionalising the Treaties, strengthening the Union's external role (as regards its legal personality, the institutional machinery of defence and security policy, etc.) and making decision-making procedures more democratic in the areas of economic policy and coordination of the latter with social and employment policies.