The Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Inigo MENDEZ DE VIGO (EPP-ED, E) and Antonio José SEGURO (PES, P) on the Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union. The committee believed that the unsatisfactory outcome of the last IGC served to underline the limits of the purely intergovernmental method, something which was acknowledged by the Heads of State or Government in a Declaration annexed to the Treaty. It therefore wanted the convening of the new IGC (which would carry out the next revision of the Treaties) to be based on a radically different process, one which was transparent and open. The committee accordingly proposed that a Convention be convened at the start of 2002, made up of members of the EP, national parliaments, the Commission and the governments of the Member States, to prepare for the IGC. The Convention should submit to the IGC a constitutional proposal based on the findings of a broad public debate. The committee issued an appeal to the national parliaments to support the convening of such a Convention when taking their decision on the ratification of the Nice Treaty, and said the candidate countries should also be involved in the Convention. While highly critical of the Nice Treaty, the report noted that it had nevertheless removed the last formal obstacle to enlargement. However, it stressed that a Union of 27 Member States or more required more far-reaching reforms in order to ensure democracy, efficiency and transparency. It insisted in particular on the need to widen the use of qualified majority voting in Council, together with the use of co-decision with Parliament for all decisions of a legislative nature, and on the need to incorporate the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the Treaty. The report said that Parliament should take account of the results of the next reform when it delivered its verdict on the various accession Treaties. The report took the view that the Nice Treaty marked the end of one process; it now called for a constitutional process to be launched which would culminate in a constitution for the EU. A debate on the future of the EU could not be limited to the four subjects specified in Declaration 23 annexed to the Nice Treaty, which were not exclusive. Parliament should put forward specific proposals with a view to the European Council to be held at Laeken. Lastly, the report said Parliament must take into account the outcome of the Laeken European Council when it gave its opinion on the opening of the next IGC, which should be held in the second half of 2003 rather than in 2004 (the year of the European elections), as envisaged at Nice.