The Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union

2001/2022(INI) - 25/04/2001 - Document attached to the procedure

PURPOSE: To present Commission proposal on targeted and timely arrangements for the debate on the future of the European Union. CONTENT: The Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) responsible for drawing up the Treaty of Nice recognises that the Treaty itself does not significantly reform the EU Treaties. Rather it makes a number of adjustments to the Treaties to allow for a smooth enlargement of the European Union. In order to further the reform process, the IGC adopted the "Declaration on the future of the Union". This declaration calls for a "deeper and wider debate about the future development of the European Union." It also envisages a three pronged process: 1. A period of open reflection commencing in 2001; 2. A period of structured reflection as from 2002; 3. The calling of a new Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. Subjects for debate during the period of reflection should focus on: - The delineation of powers between the European Union and the Member States; - The status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; - The simplification of the Treaties; and - The role of national Parliaments within Europe. The key element in these discussions is how to involve as much as possible European citizens. The IGC is anxious that comments should not be restricted to government officials and Parliaments. Given the far reaching changes implicated in the IGC there is a perceived need to address the fundamental issues with as wide an audience as possible. The Commission, given past experience, and its institutional role, believes it is in a unique position to facilitate a co-ordinated, effective campaign. Past experience working on the "Dialogue on Europe" is presented as a good reason to entrust the Commission with the organisation of the new "Debate on the future of the European Union". Furthermore a budget line, B3-306 which aims to offer information to EU civilians such as the euro, enlargement etc. already exists. Organising an information strategy on the future of Europe under this budget heading would be both appropriate and natural. The Commission recognises that the key criteria for a successful, all inclusive debate, depends on: - A bottom-up, citizens-driven approach; - Regular contributions from politicians and senior officials; - An efficient feedback mechanism to ensure that contributions from citizens and other interested parties is channelled back to the political level for information and reaction. In light of the above the Commission proposes the following specific actions for the year 2001: - The development of a "Future of Europe" website; - The establishment of discussion forums on the web; - Internet chats; - Active involve of the Commission's relays all over Europe; - Active involvement of the media; - Inter-active cross-border events (e.g video conferences); - Involvement of schools in the Member States and applicant countries; - Preparing and translating summaries of meetings, discussionsand chats; - Organisation of tenders; - Preparation of electronic mail system; - Preparation of the necessary budget and human resources for a larger operation as from 2002 onwards.