Participation in the institutional system by social representatives and citizens in the framework of the IGC 1996

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The report by Mr Philippe HERZOG on the participation of social representatives and other citizens in the institutional system of the European Union, which was adopted by the Committee on Institutional Affairs, declared that European citizens should not be dissociated from the democratic debate. The Committee was convinced that if the EU wanted its citizens to participate in European integration, it should pledge itself to this both as a social Union and as an economic Union. In this respect the Committee on Institutional Affairs recalled the position which Parliament had adopted in favour of the immediate incorporation in the Treaty of the basic principles of the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights. In order to allow citizens greater involvement in debating problems of common interest to the EU, the report proposed that the Treaty should provide for an annual conference to be held within the framework of a plenary session of the European Parliament, with the participation of the Council and the Commission. In order to prepare its position on this, Parliament would audition representatives from the Economic and Social Committee and from the Committee of the Regions. In addition, the Herzog report recalled that the right to information in all its aspects - education, the sharing of knowledge, communication between citizens and between citizens and institutions - was vital for the proper exercise of democracy and reiterated the importance of transparency in respect of EU institutions. The report advocated that the Treaty should incorporate a general principle proclaiming the right of each citizen and representative organisation to express their opinion and to have this opinion heard. The Treaty should also give each citizen the right to receive, either directly or indirectly, replies to questions which have been raised, without this necessarily implying any direct involvement in decision taking. It also called for a reinforcement of social dialogue within the general framework of a social policy which would allow both arms of the legislature to play their role to the full.