Assessment of the Reflection Group's work; EP political priorities for the Intergovernmental Conference

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In its resolution on the working of the Treaty in the run up to the 1996 intergovernmental conference, the European Parliament presented a series of specific proposals to reform the Treaty on European Union. This resolution, which was adopted by 289 votes to 103 with 74 abstentions, will be used as a negotiating position by the two European Parliament representatives, Mrs GUIGUOU (Socialist, F) and Mr BROK (Christian-Democrat, D) during the work carried out work in Messine on 2 June 95 by the Reflection Group in charge of preparing the actual conference. Parliament's position is a pragmatic approach which sets out a list of demands without dressing it up as a political project in the narrow sense of the term. The main demands set out by Parliament are as follows: 1) UNION OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES: . the Union should strengthen the current framework of its activities as a single institutional framework (by merging the three pillars of the Treaty into a clearer, more logical unified treaty); . it should be more efficient in taking on its new responsibilities under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In this respect, the common defence policy should safeguard the Union borders within the framework of the powers of the Western European Union (WEU). A number of Member States should be able to implement humanitarian or military projects ("joint actions") defined by qualified majority, although no Member State should be forced to take part in or able to prevent such action. The Commission should have a right of initiative in defining the CFSP and the European Parliament should be consulted when the Council decides on a common position or joint action. Article 223 should be deleted (obstacle to controls on the sale of arms to third countries). The European Parliament has suggested that a civil European peace corps be set up in order to settle conflicts peaceably; . action in the area of home affairs and justice should be more efficient and Union powers in this area should gradually be communitized (the same applies to powers derived from the Schengen agreements); . EMU should be more balanced: monetary provisions should be counterbalanced by stronger coordination of economic policies, while maintaining the present timetable. The European Parliament should have wider powers here. The Union should make employment its number one priority by setting up a committee on employment with the same powers as the Committee on Monetary Affairs; . the Union should increase its citizens' rights: it should accede to the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights, expressly include the principle of equal treatment (including of workers) and the abolition of the death penalty in the Treaty and make provision for more efficient protection of minorities; . at the same time, the Union should strengthen its current economic and social cohesion policies, it social policy, equal treatment etc. and clarify its powers on the basis of the principles of "subsidiarity" and "proportionality". The European Parliament feels that drawing up a set list of how powers are divided between the Union and the Member States is too inflexible. Article 235 should be maintained but used as a last resort and only with Parliament's assent. 2) THE UNION INSTITUTIONS: . the single institutional framework must be guaranteed (by incorporating the ECSC and EURATOM treaties in a single treaty and abolishing the "pillars"). The European Parliament is in favour of a Union with a legal personality. However, this unity should be flexible enough to incorporate future arrangements and the enlargement of the Union but should not result in an "à la carte Europe", to which the European Parliament was quite opposed; . the European institutions should be strengthened and democratized: the European Parliament called for the Member States' involvement in the institutions to be re-examined from the point of view of enlargement, so that it does not end up paralyzing the present institutional system in the Community (concept of statutory equality of the Member States and the fair participation and involvement of each); . the European Parliament redefined the role of each institution: - Commission: the president of the Commission should be directly elected by the European Parliament on the basis of a list of names proposed by the Council. The college as a whole (one Commissioner per Member State) should be given a vote of investiture by the European Parliament, which should be able to demand that certain of

its members resign from office. - Council: the principle of transparency should be explicitly set out in the Treaty and applied (publication of more Council documents) and the current presidency system should be made more flexible. One of the European Parliament's main demands concerns extending qualified majority voting in the Council. Unanimity should continue to be required in a limited number of cases (amendment of the Treaty, enlargement, Community own resources, uniform electoral system and application of Article 235). However, Parliament is opposed to the principle of a "double majority" which would take account both of the Member States and populations, given that the European Parliament represents the population of the Community and the Council represents the Member States. The European Parliament also called for the current qualified majority threshold (of 71%) to be lowered. - European Parliament: the European Parliament intends to limit the size of Parliament to 700 members with a common status for Members of the European Parliament, who should be treated on an equal footing with the Council in all areas of legislative and budgetary jurisdiction. Its role should be enhanced in the area of the CFSP, justice and home affairs and EMU. Parliament should have the right to take recourse to the courts. It should also be involved in decisions on its headquarters. Finally, the European Parliament insists on suitable cooperation between it and the national parliaments. 3) DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES IN THE UNION: The European Parliament called for: - the legislative function to be revised so that there are only 3 decision-making procedures: . consultation, for decisions relating to the CFSP; . assent, for revision of the Treaties, international agreements, enlargement and own resources; . co-decision, in all other cases; . cooperation: abolished. The European Parliament is in favour of streamlining the codecision procedure and of being given the same amount of time as the Council for examining proposals at first reading. The European Parliament also called for a reduction in the volume of acts submitted to it (introduction of a hierarchy of standards). In addition, the European Parliament called for the "comitology" procedures to be simplified (implementing measures to be granted solely to the Commission, with an advisory committee where necessary). The European Parliament also called for greater say when international agreements are concluded (especially during the negotiating stage); - the budgetary function to be clarified (distinction between own resources, financial regulation and budgetary rigour) and the budgetary procedure to be simplified. The European Parliament called for the EDF to be included in the budget, together with activities under the second and third pillars. Finally, the budgetary authority should be responsible for revenue; - the control function to be strengthened, mainly by taking more decisive action to combat fraud. IV. ENLARGEMENT PROSPECTS: The European Parliament reserved the right to table proposals needed within the framework of enlargement in order to safeguard the principles of competition, cooperation and solidarity which underpin the European structure. V. MONITORING: The European Parliament is in favour of an open debate during the Reflection Group stage, publication of the minutes of the group's discussions and a hearing on the main agenda of the IGC. It therefore called for a greater say by being granted the possibility of giving its assent to the outcome of IGC negotiations. The national parliaments should likewise be involved by consulting them as a matter of course on major amendments to the Treaty. The European Parliament hoped that the new Treaty would be ratified by a referendum at Union level or that the Member States would decide to organize national referenda at the same time. Finally, the European Parliament is in favour of amending article N of the Treaty so that, like the Commission, it can submit proposed amendments to the Treaty and these changes can be approved jointly by Parliament and the Council before being ratified by the national parliaments.