Treaties, amendment: draft constitutional Treaty, intergovernemental Conference IGC for October 2003

2003/0902(CNS) - 24/09/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Jose Maria GIL-ROBLES GIL-DELGADO (EPP-ED, Spain) and Dimitrios TSATSOS (PES, Greece). Parliament welcomed the draft Constitution and noted with satisfaction that it entrenches the values, objectives, principles, structures and institutions of Europe's constitutional heritage, so that, to a great extent, the draft not only assumes the character of a constitutional text but also provides for its continuous evolution. Parliament approved of many aspects of the draft. It highlighted the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the simplification of EU acts, the abolition of the pillar structure, the wider use of the co-decision procedure and of qualified majority voting, the election of the President of the Commission by Parliament, the introduction of the citizen's right of legislative initiative, the possibility of structural co-operation in security and defence policy, and the separation of the Euratom Treaty from the legal structure of the future Constitution. Parliament also welcomed the abolition of the distinction between obligatory and non-obligatory expenditure in the budget and the extension of co-decision to the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. Certain aspects require further monitoring during their implementation: - the election of the President of the European Council cannot in itself solve all the current problems affecting the functioning of that institution and could entail unforeseeable consequences for the institutional balance of the EU. The role of the President must be strictly limited to that of a chairperson in order to avoid possible conflicts with the President of the Commission or the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs. It must not to endanger their status or encroach in any way on the Commission's role in external representation, legislative initiative, executive implementation or administration; - the creation of the office of Union Minister for Foreign Affairs will enhance the Union's visibility and capacity for action on the international stage but it is vital that the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs be supported by a joint administration within the Commission; - the European Ombudsman, who is elected by Parliament, and the national ombudsmen might propose a more comprehensive system of non-judicial remedies in close cooperation with Parliament's Committee on Petitions. Parliament added that, under the budget procedure, its powers should not be reduced by comparison with the present situation. Parliament went on to welcome the disappearance of the link between the weighting of votes in Council and the distribution of seats in Parliament, a link laid down in the protocol to the Nice Treaty. Members did voice concern about "unsatisfactory answers to some fundamental questions", particularly regarding the consolidation of economic and social cohesion policy, the co-ordination of economic policy, the appointment of members of the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance, the continuation of unanimous voting in Council for the CFSP and certain areas of social policy. Parliament hoped also hope that the reform of the Commission willnot affect the collegiate nature of this institution. It regretted that the system envisaged makes it difficult to keep a good European Commissioner for a second term. However, notwithstanding certain limits and contradictions, the result of the work of the Convention should be endorsed, representing as it does an historic step towards a European Union which is more democratic, efficient and transparent. Parliament urged the IGC to respect the consensus reached by the Convention, to avoid negotiations on the fundamental decisions reached by the Convention and to approve the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe without altering its basic balance while aiming at reinforcing its coherence.