

Period of reflection: structure, subjects and context for an assessment of the debate on the European Union

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Andrew DUFF (ALDE , UK) and Joannes VOGGENHUBER (Greens/ALE, DE) in response to the decision by the European Council in June 2005 to set in train a period of dialogue or reflection on the future of the EU. MEPs stressed the need to involve all European citizens in the process of building Europe 's future. They also criticised the Council and Commission for failing to give a clear focus to the reflection period.

The report said that the EU should achieve a Constitution by 2009 to guarantee an effective and democratic Union . MEPs also argued that no further enlargement, after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria , was possible on the basis of the Treaty of Nice, which was "not a viable basis for the continuation of the European integration process". The report criticised the suggestion that core groups of Member States could be established while the constitutional process was still in train and that "coalitions of certain Member States" could be formed outside the EU system.

The committee noted that a limited number of reforms could be introduced at this stage without treaty change, through inter-institutional agreement or by revising rules of procedure, namely, transparency of lawmaking in the Council, introduction of a form of citizens' initiative, and more rigorous scrutiny by each national parliament of its government's conduct of EU affairs.

MEPs agreed that the European dialogue should be structured by common themes and have clear political goals to ensure citizens' participation. They called for the European Parliament to invite national parliaments to a series of conferences - 'Parliamentary Forums' - in order to stimulate the debate and shape the necessary political conclusions. The media should also be enlisted for the purpose of publicising and intensifying the debate. The priority issues to be addressed by the Parliamentary Forums and in the broader public debate should include the integration process, the EU's global role, the European social and economic model, and freedom, security and justice. The committee also called on the Member States to organise a large number of public meetings and media debates on the future of Europe - 'Citizens' Forums' - at national, regional and local level.

MEPs suggested that the conclusions of the period of reflection should be drawn at the latest in the second half of 2007 and that a clear decision be reached at that stage about how to proceed with the constitution. Although the report looked at the various options available to the Union , which could include abandoning the constitutional project altogether, restructuring and/or modifying the present text with the aim of improving it, or embarking upon a complete re-write, MEPs agreed that it was important not to pre-empt the outcome of the debate. They did say, however, that a "positive outcome of the period of reflection would be that the current text can be maintained", while admitting that this would only be possible if accompanied by "significant measures" to reassure and convince public opinion.