

The participants speak out strongly in favour of ratification of the Reform Treaty. They are convinced that the Treaty will improve the functioning of the European Union also in its external dimension.

### **EU borders**

The borders of the Union have never been clearly defined. And this was acceptable until now. But experience has shown that this uncertainty creates fears inside the Union. Yet the borders should not be cut in stone once and for all but include certain flexibility according to changing political situations in an unpredictable future.

- **EU accession criteria and integration capacity**

Accession criteria have been progressively defined over the years. From the simple taking over the so called "acquis communautaire" the Union has moved to further criteria such as:

- existence of a stable, democratic system, respecting the rule of law and human rights, and
- acceptance of the market oriented economy.

Since the Copenhagen Summit in June 1993 the "absorption capacity" of the Union was added to the criteria. For the first time the consequences of enlargement for the functioning of the Union, its institutions, common policies and the budget had to be taken explicitly into consideration. As the referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands have shown, the integration capacity of the Union population should be added. Whether this should be realised by a popular vote - referenda - was an open question. It would mean a more direct involvement of citizens, but also raise a controversial issue of popular consultation besides the democratic ratification process.

Although the enlargement process is regarded as a success, certain participants considered it appropriate to contemplate a pause in the enlargement process to allow for a further deepening, which means making the EU fit for further enlargement. Yet, the majority considered it necessary to at least bring accession negotiations to an end with those countries with which they have already started.

The solution of problems arising from continuous enlargements may lie in differentiated membership schemes (concentric circles), which would allow to accommodate countries in the "Home Europe" which cannot or don't want to move as rapidly as others on the road of further integration. The participants did not underestimate the problems inherent with those schemes, but it was clear for everybody that it will no longer be possible that a minority of Member States would prevent others from moving forward. In particular some candidate countries may consider that this formula may lead to a lasting graduation among the Member States.

On the other hand some participants proposed to organise the neighbourhood policy with an approach of olympic rings, meaning that the EU would coordinate areas of collaboration with non-Member countries based on their geographical proximity and common interest.

There was widespread feeling that the citizens, the civil society, should have a bigger role in determining the future and size of the Union. Nevertheless the majority considered referenda not as an adequate mean to give the citizens a say in these matters, although many of them could accept referenda if they are as far as possible detached from national contexts and carried on the European level.

Many participants felt that more time and information would be necessary to prepare for further enlargements.

- **European neighbourhood policy**

There are more innovative ideas demanded to complete and deepen this strategic policy. Some people understand that the neighbourhood policy is actually a tool to cooperate with countries that will not be Members of the EU. On the other part the neighbourhood policy may be used as a "waiting room" for countries not regarded at the moment as candidate countries.

- **EU in the world**

European Citizens expect from the European Union to strengthen its capacity to act abroad. This policy is considered to be important to keep our stability, prosperity and security. An important step forward of the Reform Treaty is the introduction of the High Representative who will be the Vice-President of the Commission and at the same time will chair the External Relations' Council.

The majority of the participants felt that the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the single integrated external service will provide a substantial improvement in the coordination, development and coherence of the common external policy.

Certain aspects are less known to the public and less visible, but nonetheless very important, i.e. transfer of the visa and asylum policy under the scrutiny of the Parliament.

In spite of this progress there is a clear disappointment about the unanimity that is still kept in the EFSP field.

So far the EU has proven its influence through the means of the so called "soft power", which has also revealed its efficiency in the enlargement processes.

Regarding the situation in the world some participants wondered how a diplomatic corps can be a convincing power without military backup. So far the peacekeeping missions were not sufficient and the common defence policy should ensure that the EU has the ability to engage in this kind of missions when needed and under the UN mandate.

The European values, like democracy, tolerance, respect for diversity, freedom of mind and religion should be promoted in opposition to radical, totalitarian and fundamentalist ideologies.

The disappearance of the Union's symbols from the new text, an aspect which has a particular significance in relation with the rest of the world, was regretted.

- **development policy**

Development policy in the third world should pay more attention to the governance process in the recipient countries.

In order to facilitate the development projects the EU carries out, it should evaluate whether there are no actions in other EU policy areas that counter the development aid, like for instance the Common Agriculture Policy. Also the European Institutions acting in the field of development, humanitarian aid or human rights may better coordinate their actions in order to send clear messages and better achieve their goals.