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Committee on Foreign Affairs

2005/2146(INI)

25.11.2005

OPINION

of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

for the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

on the period of reflection: the structure, subjects and context for an assessment
of the debate on the European Union
(COM – 2005/2146(INI))

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

The ratification process of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe

1. Pending the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, warns against any total or partial endorsement of the new Treaty provisions given its constitutional ambition and the fact that this could be perceived as an attempt to circumvent citizens' wishes in the countries which have not yet ratified the Constitutional Treaty;
2. Considers equally impracticable any attempt to renegotiate the Constitutional Treaty since this already expresses the most balanced solution that could be achieved during the negotiations both within the European Convention and at the subsequent IGC, and has in fact already been ratified by more than half of the Member States;
3. Regrets that the ratification process has foundered in two Member States; supports, however, the view that the ratification process should continue at the pace decided on by each Member State and that the Constitutional Treaty can be applied as a whole only if and when the ratification is completed in accordance with the new Treaty; recommends to take advantage of the reflection period to respond without delay to the matters which appear to be at the root of the failure of the ratification process in two Member States and to fill the current gap between citizens wishes and the European integration process in order that the progress towards a constitutional Europe may resume;
4. Proposes that, in parallel to the reflection process, and without delay, the European Parliament launch and coordinate a 'European Citizens First' initiative, aimed at proactively addressing current concerns and wishes of European citizens on EU matters; is of the view that such an initiative would allow the institutions to foster a positive attitude at the European level in order to prevent the nationalist approach from prevailing once more in the European debate; underlines that such a wide-ranging initiative can and must be undertaken on the basis of the existing Treaties, only requiring political consensus;
5. Recommends that such an Initiative covers non-exhaustive arrangements such as:
 - (a) a general debate to take place at the beginning of every year in the European Parliament with the participation of all the Heads of Government or their representatives and European Commissioners on the guidelines of the different European policies,
 - (b) extensive public debates in national parliaments on the European initiatives which especially concern European citizens such as human security including the fight against terrorism, enlargement, immigration, the social model, etc., preferably grouped in a specific "European debate day" to be established, possibly simultaneously, in each national parliament,
 - (c) the greater participation of European actors, such as Members of the European Parliament and Commissioners and high-ranking officials of the different European

institutions, in national/regional debates so as to better explain what the European Union actually deals with as well as getting feedback on what could be achieved,

(d) the setting up of "National and European Citizens' Fora" to openly discuss any aspect affecting everyday life within the Union,

(e) prior to adoption of any important legislation, an assessment should be established setting out its expected impact on the day-to-day life of the citizens as well as the way in which such legislation takes into account their concerns and wishes,

(f) the creation of a "European Civic and Democratic Space" on the basis of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union and the legislative package needed for its development,

(g) the enhancement of democracy and openness in the European decision-making process without further delay by promoting the Constitution's initiative to convene European referendums, officially establishing the right of petition, opening to the public all the deliberations and voting in the Council of Ministers as well as the warning procedure provided in favour of the national parliaments regarding the principle of subsidiarity;

6. Points out that the European integration process needs to be brought closer to young people and accordingly proposes that European history and the workings of the EU institutions be made a compulsory subject of study in all EU schools;

Making the most of the existing Treaties in the meantime

7. Is of the view that the period of reflection on the Constitutional Treaty ratification process decided by the Brussels European Council of 16-17 June 2005 offers a good opportunity for further re-examination of the role of each institution both in the external action field of the Union as a whole and in the CFSP field; considers that major improvements could be made without delay on the basis of the existing Treaties in terms of coherence, visibility, openness, and efficiency in some areas which could offer real European added value;
8. Recalls in this connection that, according to the latest Eurobarometer, public support exists in all Member States (almost 69%) in favour of a bigger role for the Union in external relations and that the new Constitution's provisions in this area have not been questioned during the ratification process; underlines therefore that the CFSP could also play an important role in reinforcing the European project in public opinion and in demonstrating the advantages of the relevant parts of the Constitutional Treaty;
9. Regrets, in this respect, the attitude of some Members States which, in spite of the adoption of the Constitution by the European Council, have used the right of veto in important foreign affairs matters for domestic reasons; calls, therefore, on all Member States to act in a constructive manner in line with the spirit of the Constitution;
10. Points out that the appointment of the High Representative/Secretary General of the Council has improved the visibility of the EU on the world stage, but takes the view that such visibility has not been matched by an equal improvement of the effectiveness of the

EU external action;

11. Proposes therefore that, during the reflection period, priority be given to a limited number of areas which better connect with the wishes and concerns of European citizens and their expectations of the role to be played by the Union in international affairs, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, human security and the fight against terrorism, migration management, including measures to combat illegal immigration, and the Union's contribution to poverty reduction and better economic and sustainable development in a globalised world;
12. In this regard, recommends to the Commission that it should present urgent proposals in those priority areas and better exploit the immense possibilities offered by the political, commercial, economic and financial instruments and policies under the first pillar of the existing treaties as a whole, thereby constituting a significant 'soft power' falling within the competence of the Community and serving the Union's objectives in international affairs;
13. Recommends in this connection that the Commission should develop a far more integrated and proactive approach in the Community's external action field and also exploit better its important role under the second pillar of the existing treaties, for example by making more decisive use of its right of initiative in the area of CFSP, targeting particular issues where European opinion clearly expects action;
14. Underlines that political dialogue with third countries and regions, more proactive action in relations with international organisations and more flexible and dynamic use of the Commission's delegation network, undoubtedly one of the most effective and well informed foreign services in the world, could create additional opportunities regarding both first and second pillar activities;
15. Recalls in this connection that although parliamentary diplomacy does not constitute an alternative to established, inter-governmental diplomacy, it could play a much more meaningful role as a complementary tool for the relations of the Union with third countries and regions; stresses therefore its readiness to use its network of more than 30 standing parliamentary delegations, its numerous ad hoc delegations and inter-parliamentary conferences to strengthen the Union's external action as well as its CFSP;
16. Is of the view that, without altering the existing decision-making process, many additional practical arrangements could be made to enhance coherence in the concerted action of the Union's institutions and services on external affairs, such as:
 - (a) unreservedly sharing the information, reports and analyses compiled by the services, delegations, Special Representatives, embassies, etc. of the Union and its institutions and of the Member States,
 - (b) holding regular joint meetings between the Group of External Relations Commissioners, the High Representative/Secretary-General of the Council and delegations of the Committees of the European Parliament dealing with external affairs issues in order to better appreciate and coordinate strategic priorities,

- (c) holding regular joint meetings between the Council's Working Groups and COREPER, the Commission and the rapporteurs of the EP in order to be better acquainted with each other's current positions,
 - (d) improving cooperation between the Directorates for External Actions of the three European institutions by facilitating regular working meetings and exchanges at high level (Directors-General and Directors) and medium level (Heads of Unit and Desk Officers), including the rotation and exchange of European civil servants dealing with external affairs issues,
 - (e) enhancing the interaction between the 127 delegations and representations with other EU institutions and delegations, Member State foreign ministries and embassies, European business and European citizens by organising regular contacts and meetings, providing practical assistance and exchanging Member States' diplomatic personnel and officials of the relevant institutions on a reciprocal basis;
17. Recommends to continue pragmatically to develop and build up the ESDP on the basis of the decisions adopted by the European Council and the Council of Ministers, as has been the case since the St Malo Declaration in 1998; shares the view that these decisions are already covered by the existing treaties (in particular Articles 18(2) and 26 of the Treaty on European Union, under which the Presidency and the High Representative are responsible for implementing decisions taken by the Council pursuant to Article 13(3)) and that they could therefore be put in place prior to, and if necessary also without, the Constitutional Treaty, provided that the necessary transparency and accountability are assured;
 18. Proposes to greatly reinforce the European Union Satellite Centre (EUSC) both on a personnel and budgetary level so as to better achieve its main objective of general security surveillance and support for Petersberg type missions, treaty verification, arms proliferation control, maritime surveillance and environmental monitoring (including both natural and man-induced disasters);
 19. Is convinced in particular that ensuring the democratic accountability and transparency of all activities undertaken by the European Defence Agency is a matter of urgency which does not depend on the coming into force of the new Treaty; is further convinced that setting up the European Civil Peace Corps in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament on several previous occasions is also now feasible;
 20. Encourages both the Council and the Member States to further increase de facto parliamentary scrutiny of ESDP, at national level, by enhancing the role played by national parliaments in the authorisation of ESDP operations, and, at European level, by giving the European Parliament a major role in the scrutiny of the entire CFSP budget through a revision of the 1999 Interinstitutional Agreement;
 21. Asks once more that the Council should not only inform but also regularly consult and involve Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices made on CFSP/ESDP;

Preparatory work on the setting up of the External Action Service

22. Stresses that the creation of the new post of EU Minister for Foreign Affairs and building up the future External Action Service (via for example an ad hoc interinstitutional agreement) needs to be in line with the progress of the ratification process and to be under parliamentary scrutiny;
23. Recommends that the provisions of the Constitutional Treaty be followed by steadily progressing the preparatory work for the new Service, whilst providing for its effective creation only following ratification of the Constitutional Treaty.

PROCEDURE

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| Title | Period of Reflection: the structure, subjects and context for an assessment of the debate on the EU |
| Procedure number | 2005/2146(INI) |
| Committee responsible | AFCO |
| Opinion by Date announced in plenary | AFET 7.7.2005 |
| Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary | |
| Draftsperson Date appointed | Elmar Brok 29.8.2005 |
| Previous draftsperson | |
| Discussed in committee | 4.10.2005 22.11.2005 |
| Date adopted | 23.11.2005 |
| Result of final vote | + : 54 - : 6 0 : 1 |
| Members present for the final vote | Vittorio Agnoletto, Angelika Beer, André Brie, Elmar Brok, Simon Coveney, Véronique De Keyser, Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, Camiel Eurlings, Alfred Gomolka, Klaus Hänsch, Richard Howitt, Anna Ibrisagic, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Jelko Kacin, Georgios Karatzaferis, Ioannis Kasoulides, Helmut Kuhne, Joost Lagendijk, Vytautas Landsbergis, Cecilia Malmström, Pierre Moscovici, Pasqualina Napoletano, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, Vural Öger, Cem Özdemir, Alojz Peterle, Tobias Pflüger, João de Deus Pinheiro, Paweł Bartłomiej Piskorski, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, Michel Rocard, Libor Rouček, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Jacek Emil Saryusz-Wolski, György Schöpflin, Gitte Seeberg, Hannes Swoboda, István Szent-Iványi, Konrad Szymański, Antonio Tajani, Paavo Väyrynen, Inese Vaidere, Geoffrey Van Orden, Ari Vatanen, Josef Zieleniec |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Alexandra Dobolyi, Árpád Duka-Zólyomi, Kinga Gál, Marie Anne Isler Béguin, Tunne Kelam, Jaromír Kohlíček, Alexander Lambsdorff, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Doris Pack, Aloyzas Sakalas, Pierre Schapira, Inger Segelström, Csaba Sándor Tabajdi, María Elena Valenciano Martínez-Orozco, Marcello Vernola |
| Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote | Thomas Wise |

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| Comments (available in one language only) | ... |
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