

Intervention by Peter Hain, representative of the UK Government, at the Convention plenary devoted to civil society on 24/25 June 2002.

Social Policy

For me, the issues raised by the social partners and social sector group are the ones that will be the touchstone for our citizens as they judge whether this convention has been a success.

It won't make much impact on the daily lives of most people if we negotiate a constitutional text that modifies the pillar structure, or revises the procedures for comitology. This convention must not be about fiddling with the institutional settlement in a way that makes it appear to the citizen that we are an elite obsessed about obscure procedures.

Our citizens want a Europe with a strong social dimension; a Europe which is the most dynamic knowledge based society in the world, investing in people and combating social exclusion. But above all, they want jobs.

This has been the agenda of my government in Britain: social justice – through improved rights and minimum standard, but also with increased access to more and better jobs.

Europe too needs a mix of regulation and flexibility. The EU is so much more than just a market. As Emilio Gabaglio said, it has shared values of social justice and human rights. It cannot be a credible force for good in the world if its citizens are badly treated at work or civil rights and equal opportunities are denied.

But this does not mean uniformity or harmonisation of standards. How would social justice be served if EU legislation resulted in high unemployment in areas with low

productivity? Instead we should aim for deeper cooperation on the employment and social challenges we face. And we need to reform the social dialogue to produce a system based on genuine partnership.

At the Luxembourg and Lisbon Summits, the EU developed the ‘open method of coordination’. As Klaus Haensch said, the new Treaty should enshrine this approach as one of the main instruments of EU action. Yes the methodology has to be refined. But this method of achieving our social objectives is flexible; it’s far quicker than legislation; and it works.

Let’s use the Lisbon process to tackle some of the most important political issues in Europe. Let’s redouble our efforts to:

- Raise rates of participation especially for older workers
- Reform welfare systems to make work pay
- Promote employability through training and education
- Reform pensions to ensure a secure future
- Lift families out of poverty

This Convention must make sure our Europe is a Europe for the people and not for the elites.