

Statement by Mr Henrik Hololei
Alternate Member of the Convention
Government of Estonia
on Institutional Questions
20-21 January 2003, Brussels

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We did not have to count the cameras at the start of today's meeting to grasp the importance of the subject that the Convention has now come to discuss. We have already listened to a wide range of proposals. I think most of the possible alternatives in the institutional questions have been listed and the main task to tackle now is to select which tools and how should we be using in the enlarged Union.

We all agree that the institutional modifications should lead to a Union that is more democratic, efficient and transparent. Many speakers today have noted that the present balance between the three main institutions should be preserved and the guaranteed equality between the Member States should be maintained.

Commission

I think most of you will agree with me that it is the ever more persistent use of the Community method and the centrality of the Commission that is at least in part behind the success of the Union. We should make sure that the new arrangements would not weaken the role of the Commission – the bearer of the common interest and the guarantor of level playing field for all the Member States. It is my firm belief that this can only be achieved by maintaining the principle of one Commissioner per Member State. Only this way we can be sure that all Member States have an equal voice in the College. The principle one country – one Commissioner would also give this vital European institution more visibility in the eyes of the people. Instead of largely anonymous foreigners one would at least be able to recognise a domestically well-known public figure in the heart of the decision-making of the European Commission, giving, among the domestic public, a human face to the EU.

Regarding the election of the President of the Commission, I believe that the present system of election could be preserved as this has in the best way ensured the support of the Member States to the President of the Commission. We do not want the President of the Commission to be too dependent on the political majority in the European Parliament, instead of the Member States.

Council

When discussing the future of the presidency of the Council and the European Council, some colleagues have suggested that the present system of six-month rotation has

incurable deficiencies. However, my Government has so far not been convinced of that. In my mind the disadvantages are largely managerial and the advantages political. We should not drop the real benefits we have for the sake of some technical modifications that can be easily introduced.

I believe that a system of rotation is the only one *guaranteeing* a true equality of Member States, big and small, northern and southern. This system ensures that every Member State has the right to chair the European Union, the most powerful form of the co-operation of States in the world, giving every Member State an international visibility and stressing the European values of equality and solidarity between states. This has to be explicitly stated by the future Constitutional Treaty as it is now in the TEU.

The occasional inconsistencies of rotation should be targeted by other means than electing a full-time President of the European Council – i.e. long-term sectoral planning and work-plans, ensuring better cohesion of different policy areas. The role of the Secretary General of the Council should be strengthened in order to ensure better continuity. The role of the High Representative should be strengthened in order to further increase the efficiency and visibility of the Union on the international arena. We see a number of other opportunities to improve the functioning of the Union and that is why my Government does not support the creation of the position of the full-time President of the European Council.