

**Contribution by Gijs de Vries,
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to the debate on institutional affairs at the European Convention,
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The key to the success of the Union is that it operates on the basis of a double balance: a balance among the institutions and a balance among the member states. We should preserve both.

The balance among the institutions depends on the preservation of the four elements of the Community Method:

- the exclusive right of initiative of the Commission,
- decision by qualified majority voting in the Council,
- codecision by the Parliament,
- ultimate control by the Court of Justice.

Now that the membership of the Union will double to 25, perhaps even 30 countries, it is essential that all four institutions be strengthened. That includes the role of the Council should not be enhanced at the expense of the other institutions.

The balance among member states is crucial in two respects: the composition of the Commission and the distribution of power in the Council.

As the Nice Treaty provides, the Commission will, eventually, be reduced in size. For the Netherlands, it is essential that the equality of all member states be guaranteed, on the basis of the principle of equal rotation, as indicated in the Benelux paper.

With respect to the European Council, the rotating presidency is another important element of the balance among member states.

The Netherlands is not in favour of the creation of a full-time President of the European Council. Far from making the EU more effective and democratic, as is the task of the Convention, a full-time President of the Union would have the opposite effect.

- A full-time President of the European Council will inevitably encroach on the powers of the President of the Commission. The result will be confusion, acrimony and stalemate.
- Thus weakened, would the European Commission still be able to attract senior politicians? Who would want to head a Commission which will have its wings clipped? A Union of 25 member states – soon 30 – needs a stronger Commission, not a weaker one.
- According to some, the President of the European Council should represent the Union at international level. Where would that leave the High Representative? His position too would suffer – just as most members of the Convention were preparing to strengthen it, as Germany originally proposed.
- A full-time President of the European Council would be the most powerful politician in Europe. But, we are given to understand, he would not be elected by the people. Nor would he be accountable to any democratic body meeting in public – not a national parliament, and not the European Parliament. How would this enhance the democratic legitimacy of the Union? How would this bring Europe closer to our citizens?

What Europe needs is the courage to address the main international problems of our time – peace and security, sustainable development, migration and international crime. That is what citizens expect of us, and what this Convention should be doing. What Europe needs is a balance among its four major institutions, each of which must be strengthened.

What Europe does not need is a new President. Let us focus on the needs of our citizens!