

## **"How to guarantee the legitimacy and acceptability of European Decisions"**

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Legitimacy has two elements:

1. Doing what the citizens want; which in essence means doing collectively those things which individual governments can no longer do on their own.
2. Doing these things in a way that is openly democratic, understandable and acceptable to the citizens

The two background documents for today's session - CONV 47 and CONV 50 - are very useful, not least because they are clear, focused and honest. The questions they raise are the right ones, and they don't seek to gloss over difficulties or criticisms.

The papers show clearly how and why the present system has developed in the way it has. We are part of a unique international organisation, based on shared sovereignty and shared values and voluntary membership. In a Europe committed to respecting diversity, sharing sovereignty between a growing number of individual national states - each with its own history, culture and administrative traditions – will never be easy. Many carefully negotiated approaches and instruments have been found and will continue to be necessary.

The documents acknowledge this and demonstrate that perfect clarity and logic are unlikely to be achieved within an inherently diverse system. However, the unquestionable complexity and opaqueness of the system, affects public perception and acceptability and must be tackled.

The lack of coherence; the growing number of instruments and measures; the sometimes questionable quality of the decisions taken, etc., is not something that can be dealt with simply by Treaty amendment. As in other aspects of the work of this Convention our primary emphasis should be on content – what the citizen wants to be done – and then how it can be done.

Tackling these important issues calls for:

- A political awareness of what is, and is not, likely to be understood and acceptable.
- The use of basic common-sense tools of communication; the language of the street rather than the rarefied language of the specialist.
- Administrative capacity to inform, explain and justify.
- A reform of national, and EU, political and parliamentary structures and attitudes to bring about better participation by citizens and better consultation.
- Above all, a willingness to take the European decision-making system out from its hiding-places and into the mainstream of political life and public scrutiny.

The question has been raised on several occasions of what institutional changes might be useful in confronting these issues - a special role for the national parliaments, a new task for the European Parliament, perhaps the creation of entirely new structures. In my opinion, we should rule out nothing at this stage. I would like to see a short European Constitutional statement of values-relating to democracy, social inclusion, an end to poverty, full employment, fundamental citizen's rights, and a new democratic world order of peace and prosperity. A second document could be a codification of existing and new instruments.

Legitimacy is at once a matter of perception and of trust and democratic accountability.

Perception requires the application of sound techniques, coherence and straightforward language.

Trust can only be built and maintained through consistency, relevance and openness.

Democratic accountability requires a clear demonstration of how decisions are made and that politicians at all levels are prepared to accept their responsibility for those decisions.