



**From the European Convention to Public Discourse:  
Debating on Common European Future**

**Istituto Affari Internazionali  
*in cooperation with*  
The Trans European Policy States Association**

**convention watch**

**GREECE**

**1. Evaluation of the work and results of the European Convention**

**1.1 Overall assessment of the results of the Convention**

*What is your government's overall assessment of the results of the Convention? How have they been received by the other main political and social actors?*

There has been a quite positive assessment of the Convention by the Greek Government. This is partly due to the fact that the Simitis Government (Socialist/PASOK) held the EU's Presidency in the first semester of 2003 and it therefore "had to" present the Thessaloniki Summit - where the Convention's work was accepted as "a good basis" for the IGC to follow – as successful. In fact, the Greek Presidency put much pressure on the Convention's President Giscard D'Estaing to present the draft Constitutional Treaty at the Thessaloniki Summit.

At the same time, what was officially considered the federal thrust of the draft Treaty was to the liking of the strongly pro-European Simitis Government. A similar stance was taken by the main opposition party (Conservative/Nea Dimocratia), with some criticism about the Government's failure to inform public opinion adequately; more or less the same applies to Synaspismos, a leftist, "EuroCommunist" party, which expressed reservations about the little attention paid by the Convention to social-policy issues. The only strong negative positions were voiced by KKE, a hard-line Communist and anti-European party that considered the work of the Convention one more step towards the subjugation of European countries – and of course of Greece – to a capitalist/neo-liberal/globalisation-friendly political system. It is to be noted that the KKE representative in the EP September debate over the Draft Constitution presented a strongly negative written assessment of the Convention' work (clearly diverging from GUE positions). Also negative were DIKKI, a left-wing party which originated from a split within PASOK, but with no seats in Parliament, as well as LAOS, an extreme right-wing party, also with no parliamentary representation. Individual PASOK members have also taken a negative position.

The business and the trade unions have been generally positive. However, the latter have shown some hesitations because of the liberal policies they think to be enshrined in the Constitution. There was a major debate about social security and labour relations: the leftist groups fear that workers' rights can potentially be threatened by the EU regulation. The Greek Orthodox Church has been very critical of the overall thrust of the Constitution; the lack of reference to the religious, Christian foundations of Europe raised special concern. Academic circles and the press have been quite favourable, although the latter did not provide extensive coverage.

## **1.2 Convention method**

*Is there the perception in your country that the Convention has contributed substantially to making the process of constitutional reform of the EU more transparent and democratic? What are considered to be the main positive elements of the Convention method? And those that, on the contrary, have drawn the most widespread criticism?*

The Convention method has been generally praised by the press, as it was seen as instrumental in alleviating the opacity of the European political scene and, consequently, the "democratic deficit" of the EU.

There have been, though, some dissenting voices who accused the whole Convention exercise of been equally out of touch with public opinion as earlier IGCs.

In Greece the Convention was seen as a positive innovation. Thanks to its composition, the principles of transparency and democratic participation were promoted in line with the need to obtain the consent not only of national governments but also of the peoples of the European Union.

Reaching consensus on a single text that does not contain different options was considered in itself a success. Among the factors that contributed to this success were: the method of work of the Convention; the role of the Praesidium; and the fact that everyone was conscious of the need to adopt as soon as possible the reforms needed to cope with the challenges posed by enlargement. In this context, there is the feeling that the Greek Presidency - which tried from the outset to find acceptable solutions - played a pivotal role.

## **1.3 Performance of national representatives**

*How do you judge the performance of the representative of your government in the Convention? Do you think that he/she played a proactive and dynamic role? What are the Convention issues on which he/she concentrated his/her interventions and proposals? Did your government work actively to adopt common positions or establish a unity of action with other governments? Did the representatives from your country at the Convention take similar stances on the most important issues, or did their different political affiliations and ideological convictions reflect in substantially different positions?*

For most of the Convention's duration, the Greek Government representative to the Convention was the member of parliament G. Katiforis, an economist with no special background on EU institutional matters. He was replaced by Foreign Minister George

Papandreou just after the beginning of the Greek presidency, a move decided to give a higher profile to the Greek participation in the Convention. Papandreou made several comments on the future of CFSP and on the direct election of the President of the Union. He was assisted by the alternate member to the Convention, P.C. Ioakimidis, who worked hand in hand with *de facto* head of prime minister's office Nikos Themelis, as well as with the director of the prime minister's legal office George Papadimitriou (who had been active earlier in the preparation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights).

Greece has always had the tendency to align itself with the prevailing pro-integrationist/federalist positions in the recent intergovernmental conferences, e.g. usually siding with the Commission. A major turning point for Greece in this Convention was the decision to abandon the front of smaller Member States on the important issue of the permanent/long-term Presidency of the Union and to side with the larger countries.

The press attributed this change in attitude to Simitis' own career ambitions to take over one of the European-level political posts in the enlarged Union.

However, despite the emphasis on the Greek role, no really influential position was taken in the Convention by any of the Greek participants.

The main Greek Government positions on the Future of Europe, as presented by Katiforis, are the following:

- He stressed that a better coordination was required to ensure coherence between various policies (in particular, of regional, budget and employment policies).
- He emphasised the economic dimension of the EU. In this regard, it was suggested:
  1. To add the objective of full employment;
  2. To analyse the implications of this objective at the institutional level and for the various EU policies;
  3. To transfer the social and employment policy to the category of shared competences;
  4. To include the question of fiscal federalism in the agenda of the Convention.
- Katiforis pleaded for the fusion of the functions of the High Representative and the Commissioner for the External Relations and for the reinforcement of the control exercised by the European Parliament and national parliaments on the EU's external action. He also supported the use of qualified majority voting in the foreign policy sector.
- He advocated the adoption of a truly constitutional text, incorporating the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- He also supported the reinforcement of the role of national parliaments, but without the establishment of new institutions.

In a contribution on the "Effectiveness and democracy in the EU", Katiforis lamented the persistent democratic deficit, the lack of transparency and the resulting little trust of the citizens towards the Union. In the economic field, he argued in favour of a politically accountable body that can serve the Union's general interests. His general argument was that making the EU more democratic would also increase its effectiveness.

## **2. National debate and public opinion trends**

### **2.1 Public opinion trends**

*How have the attitudes of public opinion towards the EU evolved in your country in the last months of the Convention's work? Can it be argued that the completion of the*

*Convention's activities, and the presentation of the draft constitutional treaty have had a substantial impact on public opinion trends?*

According to a survey conducted by "Taylor Nelson Sofres/EOS Gallup" immediately after the Thessaloniki European Council and focused on the results of the Convention<sup>1</sup>, the Greeks were the best informed about the Convention (81%). Most thought that the Convention had come up with satisfactory results. Most of the Greek citizens also want the President of the European Council to be elected by the Heads of State and Government. Also a vast majority of the Greeks are in favour of a Constitution as a way of reforming the EU. Generally, people's awareness of the Convention appears to have increased, but it remains quite limited.<sup>2</sup>

## **2.2 The role of parliament**

*Was the draft constitutional treaty approved by the Convention discussed in your national parliament? Did the committees of your parliament working on EU issues address and examine, on a more or less regular basis, the work of the Convention? How did the government inform parliament about its initiatives and positions concerning the constitutional reform of the EU?*

The draft Constitution and the overall efforts of the Convention were examined by the Committee for European Affairs, on the basis of briefings by its two vice-presidents and representatives of Parliament at the Convention, Paraskevas Avgerinos and Marietta Giannakou. However, no politically important debate took place.

## **2.3 Other relevant initiatives**

*Do you think that the many initiatives undertaken by the EU to promote a public debate on European constitutional issues, notably by involving civil society, have had an impact in your country? Has your government played an effective role in raising the knowledge and awareness of public opinion concerning the Convention's goals and activities?*

The initiatives taken by the EU (either the Commission or Parliament) to raise interest about constitutional issues remained largely unnoticed. Only such "hot" issues as the role of the Christian heritage in the Union or the desirability of enhanced cooperation in defence policy became matters of public interest.

The Greek government – especially the Ministry for Foreign Affairs – has tried to raise the interest of public opinion through an initiative called e-Vote project which allows people not only to give their answers to a pre-determined list of questions, but also to submit their own suggestions as to what issues should be given priority and how they should be tackled. The extensive feedback received from both e-voters and the media has been overwhelmingly positive.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey covered the period from the 23 to the 29 June, and took in 25000 people from all the countries in the enlarged EU.

<sup>2</sup> Further information on this survey can be found on the "analysis of public opinion" website at the following address: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index.htm)

The most popular e-Vote to date, with over 105,000 e-Voters, has been on the Iraq crisis. The e-Vote project is thought to have created a new European forum, a virtual 'Agora' where people can express their views on issues that affect their daily lives and their collective future. At the website <http://evote.eu2003.gr/>, anyone could vote on important issues, share and compare his/her ideas and opinions, and make specific suggestions about the current and future Union.

## **2.4 Media coverage**

*How was the media coverage of the final, crucial phase of the Convention's work? How extensive has information on the content of the draft constitutional treaty been? Has it been presented in a positive or negative light? Which issues have been covered the most?*

The Press and, to a lesser extent, the electronic media did not follow closely the Convention work. Only the final rush to Thessaloniki and the violent demonstrations there caused a surge in interest. A certain attention was paid to Greece's support for the defence initiative undertaken by Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg, as well as to the reference to Christianity in the Treaty.

There were some interesting articles in the Greek newspapers on the future institutional structure of the EU. The issue of how to strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy, especially after the Iraqi crisis, raised considerable interest. As far as television and radio are concerned, the national channels have broadcast several programmes devoted to European issues.

## **3. Prospects for the Intergovernmental Conference**

### **3.1 Link between the Convention and the IGC**

*The Thessaloniki Council did not go beyond defining the text of the draft constitutional treaty "a good basis for starting the Intergovernmental Conference". In your government's view, should the IGC limit itself to endorsing the results of the Convention, concentrating only on the few issues that still remain controversial, or engage in a more comprehensive review of the draft constitutional treaty?*

The position of the Greek Government is rather favourable to the idea that the IGC should stay as close as possible to, if not simply limit itself to endorsing, the Draft Treaty. Still, such matters as the composition of the Commission or the extension of QMV to new areas remain controversial; if real negotiations start, the Greek Government is likely to participate actively and even to seek alliances with other states: for instance, Greece was present in the "small Member States" meeting of Prague (1 September) which Benelux countries did not attend (see also point 3.3.2).

### **3.2 Organisation of the IGC**

*To prevent the upcoming Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) from bogging down in obscure and prolonged negotiations, as in the previous IGCs, the Italian government, which will hold the EU's presidency until December 2003, proposes that the IGC be*

*held mostly at top-level, i.e. at the level of the Heads of State and Government and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Does your government agree with this approach?*

The Greek government agrees with the approach of the Italian Presidency.

### **3.3 Controversial issues**

#### **3.3.1 Elected President of the Council**

*While there is general agreement concerning the establishment of a permanent and elected President of the Council, there are still different ideas on his/her functions, especially on whether or not he/she should play a co-ordinating role with regard to the presidencies of the other Council formations.*

At the Convention the Greek government, after some hesitation, supported the creation of a full-time President of the Council, but has continued to ask that all member states be treated on an equal footing when the President is elected. Moreover, it is of the view that the coordination tasks of the President need to be better clarified.

#### **3.3.2 Composition of the Commission**

*The debate in the Convention concerning the European Commission eventually concentrated on its composition. The Convention approved the following proposal: "The Commission shall consist of a College comprising its President, the Union Minister of Foreign Affairs/Vice-President, and thirteen European Commissioners selected on the basis of a system of equal rotation between the Member States." In addition, "the Commission President shall appoint non-voting Commissioners, chosen according to the same criteria". Does your government back this proposal or is it in favour of a different solution?*

Greece considers the role of the European Commission as a supranational and independent institution of key importance: to advance the Treaty objectives, promote common policies, and ensure the convergence between the member states (this point is especially important to Greece).

Greece is not ready to renounce the right to have a national representative in the Commission and is against the creation of second-class Commissioners without voting rights. On September 1 the Greek Foreign Minister participated, together with his colleagues from most of the smaller Member States of the enlarged EU (but, significantly, not BeneLux) in a meeting in Prague, where they adopted a common position for the IGC. They stated that "some issues ranging from aspects of institutional structures to decision-making procedures would require further consideration". One of the key demands of the smaller countries is that each should be guaranteed a post in the Commission with full voting rights.

#### **3.3.3 Definition of qualified majority voting**

*The Convention has proposed abolishing the current weighting system for qualified majority voting (QMV), by defining QMV as the majority of the member states representing at least 60% of the European population. Is your government satisfied with*

*Supported by the European Commission*

*this provision, or would it rather change it?*

Greece is not opposed to the definition of QMV adopted by the Convention.

### **3.3.4 Extension of qualified majority voting**

*Does your government support an extension of QMV to policy fields other than those indicated in the draft constitutional treaty, such as taxation and CFSP?*

Greece has been steadily in favour of extending QMV. It is particularly interested in the extension of QMV to social policy issues as a way to facilitate social reforms. Greece seems more reluctant to renounce a national veto on foreign policy, considered the public opinion's stance.

### **3.3.5 Minister of Foreign Affairs and EU diplomatic service**

*While there is a consensus on the creation of a EU Minister of Foreign Affairs, different views exist concerning the executive structure he/she should rely upon. What is your national government's position on this issue? Should the structure be placed within the Commission or the Council?*

In a joint press-conference with Giscard D'Estaing and Romano Prodi in Thessaloniki, the Greek Prime Minister emphasised his support for the creation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The technical issue of the administrative structure on which he/she will rely, although of critical practical importance, does not seem to have been addressed.

## **4. The ratification process**

### **4.1 Eventual obstacles**

*Do you think that the process of ratification of the new constitutional treaty may encounter difficulties or major political opposition in your country? If so, which?*

As in the case of the past changes of the EU's Treaties, the new constitutional Treaty will be ratified by parliament, not through a national referendum. As in the past, the parliament is likely to approve the text with a vast majority. Only in the unlikely case that, in the meantime, the accession of Cyprus is blocked, might obstacles emerge to the ratification of the constitutional Treaty.

### **4.2 European Parliament elections**

*According to the conclusions of the Thessaloniki Council, the Intergovernmental Conference should "complete its work and agree the Constitutional Treaty as soon as possible and in time for it to become known to European citizens before the June 2004 elections for the European Parliament". Do you expect the constitutional issues to become a central matter of debate during the electoral campaign in your country? Or do you think that the European Parliament elections are more likely to be dominated by national issues?*

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#### **4.3 Referendums**

*For constitutional reasons, some countries need to submit the EU Constitutional Treaty to a national referendum before it can enter into force. Others may decide to hold a referendum in order to give the national ratification more legitimacy. Is a referendum foreseen in your country? If so, do you expect this to be a factor that will complicate or facilitate the ratification process?*

There is no constitutional provision requiring a referendum for the ratification of the new constitutional Treaty.

#### **4.4 What to do in case of failed ratification**

*Has your government expressed any preference on the eventual initiatives to be undertaken in case one or more countries should fail to ratify the new treaty?*

A clear position on what to do if the new Treaty/Constitution is not ratified by all Member States has not been taken by Greece.