

OPERATIONAL PROPOSALS

WORKSHOP A TASKS (MISSIONS) OPERATIONAL PROPOSALS

NOVEMBER 9th 2007

This workshop looked at the role of civil society commenting on tasks arising from new areas of competences in the Lisbon Treaty. The areas of most interest like the social dimension, climate protection and energy as well as migration were well covered.

The unifying themes of the workshop emerged clearly:

Solidarity as a driver in terms in these themes, whether that be in migration, climate protection, energy matters or the promotion of a strong social policy in European countries.

A human vision in a range of policy areas in terms of combating discrimination, developing asylum policy, and remaining consistent in its internal and external policies.

The role and relevance of civil society in both enriching the knowledge and understanding of European institutions in measuring the impact of social and economic policies and in diffusing information and developing a participative democracy.

Interest in the Social model and Public services was a consistent area of debate but complex and with few areas of consensus-the proposition for a Commissioner in this area is therefore interesting.

These aspects of the discussion, adding value to the process of taking the work of the European Union forward suggest that the function of consulting civil society routinely should be considered and the means by which that might be achieved included a variety of models, notably the convention on the Future of Europe but also ECOSOC and the INGO group in the Council of Europe.

Migration

- The workshop looked at questions of solidarity and support for migrants rather than sanctions and more secure borders.
- The New Treaty offers more opportunities to develop positive migration policy
- There is a role for Europe taking a lead internationally on promoting peace, development and the struggle against corruption
- National government should continue to determine access to their national labour markets.
- There is a need to strengthen the cooperation with and in the Mediterranean region and develop partnerships with African countries.
- To recognise the inevitability of migration due to demographic changes
- The position of migrant women needs to be focussed upon.

Equalities

- The gender perspective needs to be strengthened in the European policies.
- There need a to be a strengthening of the perspective of the young people with regard to mobility, education and housing.
- Combating discrimination in all its forms was also raised in relation to migrants and other groups.
- The European social model appears not to be working for young people.

Social policy

- Majority of citizens are in favour of more social policy at a European level and propose the transformation of the EU from an economic to a social union.
- Some felt that social policy should remain the responsibility of national government due to the complexity and sensitivity of the issue
- Discussion on the of social services
- There was an example of good practice in the Joint Labour Market Analyses of the European social partners which looked at the labour markets and social challenges in member states

Status of civil society

- Definition of civil society
- “Institutionalisation” of civil society dialogue
- Consultation with the civil society on a regular basis
- A solution for the democratic deficit
- The means of measuring the impact of European social and economic policy on the citizens
- Council of Europe model cited as good practise as well as ECOSOC and the Convention on the Future of Europe

Climate and energy

- Strong call for sustainable development
- The need to promote European public goods
- The New Treaty offers a stronger basis for work on sustainable development
- One proposal suggested a Commissioner for sustainable development would give a focus to these matters in the EU institutions.
- Europe has an important role globally to help minimise social and environmental costs associated with energy production and also water management .

Physicality

- Among various instruments of solidarity taxation was much discussed
- Need to identify a new basis for taxation from wages, no consensus was arrived at the nature of the basis (commodities, financial transactions).
- **One position proposed the detaxation of labour and the introduction of unconditional basic income**
- The negative effect of VAT on charities

Conclusion

The Agora is a very good method for assuring the participation of civil society which should be maintained. It recognises the role and relevance of civil society in both enriching the knowledge and understanding of European institutions in measuring the impact of social and economic policies and in diffusing information and developing a participative democracy.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF VIVANT-EUROPE

To the Agora of the European Parliament (8-9 November 2007)

Workshop A – TASKS

The European Union is to tackle new topics and new solidarity. How should it address them?

First proposal : to abolish taxes on work

VIVANT-EUROPE believes that it is necessary to burdening the work done by European citizens with taxes that encourage the migration of jobs.

Taxes on work kill employment, deprive Europe of its skills and endanger the funding of our social security.

The funding of European social security should come from **a consumption tax on finished products (not on services) and in a manner that does not increase prices.**

Such a reform is essential for Europe's socio-economic future, for it guarantees social security funding and by removing taxes on work gives free play to initiatives.

(See "Examples of applications" in annex.)

Second proposal : To institutionalise the unconditional basic income at the European level

The introduction of the unconditional basic income is a measure of socio-economic integration in the same way as the introduction of the EURO was a measure of monetary integration. (See annex.)

The introduction of the Basic Income should be the result of a deliberate choice – a political decision as radical as that concerning the introduction of the EURO.

Member States must therefore transfer some of their powers to the European Union, in the framework of **shared and support competences**, so as to establish fiscal harmonisation and introduce a European basic income the amount of which would be based on each country's GDP.

Such a choice would be a distinguishing feature of Europe.

By guaranteeing institutionally a certain level of purchasing power, the Basic Income would support economic and social stability and provide insurance against the risks inherent in job mobility.

The Basic Income can become the essential feature governing legislation, the economy and social affairs.

To reach that end, **steps** must be defined – as was the case on the introduction of the EURO.

Steps

The first five steps * required for introducing VIVANT's socio-economic model are carried out at the level of each Member State within the framework of **European support measures**.

**Progressive introduction of the Vivant model*

1st step : Abolition of the need for individuals to make tax declarations

2nd step : Introduction of unconditional free sickness insurance

3rd step : Introduction of the Basic Income for those of 18 to 25 years

4th step : Progressive introduction of the Basic Income for those of 25 to 65 years

5th step : Extension of the Basic Income to children and pensioners

6th step : Application of the alternative funding method at the European level

7th step : Abolition of all taxation of services

8th step : Introduction of the Basic Income in developing countries. (Introduced in Brazil from 2004)

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The European Union should be able, with political will and institutional strength, to enable all member States to reach the 7th step, which requires **fiscal harmonisation**.

At the same time as implementing this latter step, why not set up a European economic government ?

To institutionalise the Basic Income and to create the political and financial means to implement it – THAT IS VIVANT's PROPOSAL.

VIVANT-EUROPE

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ANNEX TO VIVANT-EUROPE'S CONTRIBUTION

Agora 8 and 9 November 2007

A. Examples of applications

1. **When building a house** it's the labour that really costs the money.

Under the new system (VIVANT's socio-economic model), tax on labour is abolished while taxes on machine-made goods are increased, so that the overall cost of the house remains unchanged. For VIVANT, respect for the humanity of the individual means taxing not his labour, but what machines produce. **In this way, machines will bring freedom to men and women instead of depriving them of their jobs.**

2. **A consultation with a general medical practitioner** today costs about €20, which includes the doctor's taxes and social security contributions.

Under the new system, the consultation costs not more than €10, which represents a saving both for the patient and for the social security system.

B. Ways of collecting consumption tax

To limit occasions for fraud, VIVANT-EUROPE **proposes two methods** :

1. **To limit companies' recuperation of consumption tax**

The consumption tax paid on goods used only in the production or manufacture of finished goods is recuperable because the former, being inputs, are not consumed as end products. All inputs into production processes, such as raw materials or intermediate materials (fuel, packaging, vehicle and machine maintenance, etc.) are considered intermediate products and any VAT or consumption tax paid on them can be recuperated because they contribute directly to the process of manufacture or transformation.

On the other hand, consumption tax paid on purchasing investments in finished products which do not necessarily contribute to manufacture or transformation (such as buildings, machines, computers, office furniture, heating, vehicles, telephonic and other equipment) is not recuperable.

2. **To limit the number of actors in the market who actually collect consumption tax :**

either by collection at the factory gate, as is suggested by Pierre Aunac, a French economist ("This is the whole point of a consumption tax conceived as a social VAT, paid directly by corporations to the social organisations, as social contributions now are.")

or by collection at the wholesaler level

For example, the recuperation system should obviously apply to a wholesaler of heating equipment. But there is no point in applying it to those who install the heating systems. For control purposes, resources could thus be concentrated on the one wholesaler rather than spread between his 50 customers who install his goods. In practice, then, the latter would not have to claim reimbursement of consumption tax.

The same would apply to small retailers such as bookshops, florists, cafés and restaurants.

Collection of consumption tax will thus be carried **out more economically and effectively**, at a limited number of points in the distribution chain, and may be combined with fiscal, health and environmental traceability at the European level.

C. Consumption taxes (social VAT) and compensatory measures

The concerns of VIVANT-EUROPE are purchasing power and equity.

The measures put forward by VIVANT-EUROPE necessary for the introduction of a consumption tax (social VAT) **which will be socially just** are of five kinds :

1. A variable VAT rate (from 0 to 42 %)
2. The maintenance of purchasing power by means of an unconditional monthly basic income that may be combined with other income
(From 0 to 17 years : 150 € /From 18 to 24 years : 444 € /From 25 to 64 ans : **600 €** /Beyond 65 years : 888 €
3. A progressive income tax (up to 1500 € per month there is no income tax ; beyond that a rate of 50 % applies) (see table below)
4. A tax on financial transaction (inspired by the Tobin tax) (0,1 %)
5. An inheritance tax adapted to the economic requirements of the targeted investments

WORKSHOP B "RIGHTS" 'Fundamental freedoms and rights of the Union' Proposal for a basic text

NOVEMBER 9th 2007

1. We call on the EU institutions and Member States to acknowledge that they do not exist without citizens. The European institutions must therefore adopt working methods that take systematic account of the real lives of people within the Union and, prior to taking any decisions, systematically assess the impact of those decisions on the population. The European institutions should take into account the most discriminated and disadvantaged people in Europe when legislating, as this will benefit all human beings in Europe.
2. We consider the introduction of the provisions on gender equality, social inequality and anti-discrimination with a general application as a progress. All European legislations must be based on and ensure an effective implementation of the transversal clauses and the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
3. Gender equality must be considered as a fundamental principle of organising society.
4. We want the EU institutions to act to protect human rights equally for citizens and residents of the EU. As a goal to be reached in the near future, all people residing within the borders of the EU should acquire the same rights.

We strongly regret the unilateral opt-out protocols by the United Kingdom and Poland; we consider this step as a stand against citizens of those countries, and weakening the European Union. We

strongly call on the relevant Governments to reconsider their decisions, and we support the efforts of civil society organisations in order to assure equal democratic standards across the European Union.

Building EU policies upon equality, citizenship and non discrimination principles

5. We regret that the Treaty maintains the unanimity rule in adopting measures on citizenship and to fight against discrimination. This creates confusion and misleads people across Europe: On one hand, the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights has been given the same legal value as the Treaties. On the other hand, the unanimity principle makes any legislation on equality unlikely to be adopted in the EU.
6. Discrimination exists daily on many grounds other than the five mentioned in the article 17a of the EU Treaty. EU action should therefore be based on the open definition of Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Implementing the Charter of Fundamental Rights

7. We strongly welcome the articles 24 and 25 of the Charter that protects and promotes the rights of children and elderly people.
8. We welcome the adoption of a legally binding Charter of Fundamental Rights which will ensure protection of fundamental rights, including social rights of every person living in the European Union.
9. We call on the Commission to evaluate the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union and rights of citizens; we call on the EU to establish clear indicators and mechanisms to ensure this evaluation and impact assessment, in close cooperation with civil society and the European Parliament; we call for this evaluation to be made on the basis of both the criteria underpinning the beginning of work on the Charter (Cologne 1999) and the action programme entitled 'Leading by example: a programme of action on human rights for the European Union for 2000'.
10. We strongly welcome the legal personality of the EU and the accession of the EU to the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as stated in the Reform Treaty. We support a high level of cooperation between the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights in order to guarantee uniformed and thorough safeguards of fundamental rights across the European Union. The EU should further the work begun in the Charter drawing inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
11. We strongly urge all EU institutions as well as state, regional and local authorities to raise awareness on the Charter and European citizenship among the EU's inhabitants on a large scale by making funds available for education in the area of fundamental rights. This also implies assuring that each citizen and resident of the EU could receive freely his/her own copy of the Charter and knows how to invoke the Charter in order to defend her/his rights. It implies the provision of information and all necessary means to enable the proper understanding on how his/her rights are protected. Civil society organisations must be involved in this information process.

Participatory Democracy: Policy making should not only be done for people but with people.

12. We strongly welcome the adoption of the article II 8b on participatory democracy and call on the EU institutions and Member States to make full use of it, hereby establishing a structured and meaningful civil dialogue with non-for-profit and non-governmental organisations.
13. We consider it is the duty of policy makers to ensure the active participation of civil society organisations, especially those representing the interests of discriminated and disadvantaged people - in the drafting, enacting, implementation and evaluation of legislations.
14. We call on more structured cooperation between the European Parliament and non-governmental organisations. The Agora is a first step forward in that direction and could instigate a shift from a top-down approach to policy-making towards effective participatory democracy.
15. We demand a fast application of the citizens' initiative provisions. In the future, the Treaties should foresee the possibility to hold EU-wide referenda on specific issues. In defining the conditions and procedures for the application of the citizens' initiative, we urge the European Commission to engage with civil society organisations.

We call for a clear and uniformed definition of the term 'civil society organisations', in close cooperation with not-for-profit and non-governmental organisations.

The role of the European Fundamental Rights Agency

We call on EU institutions to bolster the competences and resources that the Agency needs to be able to play an efficient role. We also request for a redefinition of its missions.

16. One of the key missions of the Agency should be to ensure that the EU takes a human rights approach across all its policies in order to better meet the EU's commitments to human rights. This body would systematically monitor EU legislation and policies - externally and internally - for conformity with human rights standards, and receive complaints when European or national legislations violate the Charter and fundamental rights.
17. The Agency should be responsible for the development of Human rights-proofing tools and regular reports on the mainstreaming of human rights in the work of the institutions. With regard to Member States, the role of the agency could be to support a close monitoring of the human rights' record of Member States and accession countries. The Agency should draw on the work done by the Council of Europe on the matter.

WORKSHOP C "TOOLS"

NOVEMBER 9th 2007

Faced with new Challenges; Innovations to strength citizens' rights

1. After many years, the Treaty of Lisbon has finally established the European Parliament as a truly functioning legislative body within the governance system of the European Union.

2. The Treaty of Lisbon introduces a number of valuable innovations, in particular:

- A new procedure for nominating the Commission President and the Commissioners
- Virtually universal legislative co-decision with qualified majority voting within the Council
- Greater transparency of the Council's legislative processes
- Improvement in the transparency procedures and access to public documents
- Stability of the European Council Presidency
- A more democratic budgetary procedure
- Reinforced right of petition

3. Having regard to these treaty innovations, and to ever-growing global challenges, the role and place of civil society equally has to evolve in the context of European citizenship.

4. Enhancing citizenship rights

4.1 Consultative referenda

a. A large number of participants are in favour of granting competence to the European Parliament to organise EU-wide consultative referenda on European matters. Such referenda would function on the basis of an absolute majority of votes cast or a double majority system (such as provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon for voting in Council). Other participants are opposed to the idea of referenda, notably because of the complexity, cost and possibly conflicts of legitimacy.

4.2 Election of the President of the European Commission

Some participants support the idea of directly electing, in a separate vote, the President of the European Commission by universal suffrage at the same time with the European Parliament elections. Others prefer that the election of the President of the Commission be based on the principle of parliamentary democracy, as foreseen in the Treaty of Lisbon.

4.3 Participatory democracy

The workshop proposes the creation of several instruments whose objectives would be to reach out to the citizens in a more effective way, and at the same time strengthen the European public space. Amongst these we emphasise the following:

- An interactive website in which citizens could participate in debates related to ongoing legislative processes and activities of the European Union. This website should be administered by the European Parliament.
- Work on developing civic education and introducing decentralized pluralistic information and involvement.

- Supporting the Citizens' AGORA by making it permanent and with an interinstitutional character
- Strengthening all instruments which guarantee transparency

4.4 The workshop drew attention to the provisions of both the Charter of Fundamental Rights and of the Treaty on the core EU value of *non-discrimination*, in particular in respect of linguistic and cultural diversity.

5. Interdependence of the European citizens:

The workshop proposes the formulation by 2009 of a Declaration on European Citizenship by the European Parliament, with the assistance of the Citizens' AGORA. This could comprise the following elements:

- Solidarity between the citizens and territories of Europe in their efforts to build a common future;
- Defining the rights and duties of each and every person within the context of European citizenship, whatever their nationality.
- Given the overriding need for sustainable development, an “organised synergy”, based on networks, should be established between those who define standards, socially responsible investors and consumers of sustainable products and services
- An worldwide eco-vision for the future of the Union (i.e. a comprehensive sustainable development strategy)

6. Powers of the Parliament

The workshop proposes strengthening of the right of legislative initiative of the European Parliament, building on progress recently made in the Treaty of Lisbon.

The C Workshop (Instruments) makes the following recommendations to the plenary sitting of the Citizens' AGORA:

- ❑ We support the mechanism of the CITIZENS' AGORA, as initiated by the European Parliament, and its continuation with the involvement of other EU institutions.
- ❑ We ask that the European Parliament and the CITIZENS' AGORA should undertake the drafting of a Declaration on European Citizenship by 2009.
- ❑ We urge that enhanced citizenship rights (see above) be formalised in the Treaties.
- ❑ As the European Parliament is becoming a full legislative body of a two chamber system, we invite the Council of the European Union to also adapt its own procedures as regards to accessibility, transparency and accountability.
- ❑ We believe that the European Parliament should obtain two fundamental modifications to its powers:
 - a) The power of formally ratifying, on behalf of European citizens, any European Union treaty or treaty affecting the European Union before it comes into force;

- b) The power of deciding to hold EU-wide consultative referenda, after having consulted the Commission and the Council.

WORKSHOP D "BORDERS"

NOVEMBER 9th 2007

The participants speak out strongly in favour of ratification of the Reform Treaty. They are convinced that the Treaty will improve the functioning of the European Union also in its external dimension.

EU borders

The borders of the Union have never been clearly defined. And this was acceptable until now. But experience has shown that this uncertainty creates fears inside the Union. Yet the borders should not be cut in stone once and for ever but include certain flexibility according to changing political situations in an unpredictable future.

- **EU accession criteria and integration capacity**

Accession criteria have been progressively defined over the years. From the simple taking over the so called "acquis communautaire" the Union has moved to further criteria such as:

- existence of a stable, democratic system, respecting the rule of law and human rights, and
- acceptance of the market oriented economy.

Since the Copenhagen Summit in June 1993 the "absorption capacity" of the Union was added to the criteria. For the first time the consequences of enlargement for the functioning of the Union, its institutions, common policies and the budget had to be taken explicitly into consideration. As the referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands have shown, the integration capacity of the Union population should be added. Whether this should be realised by a popular vote - referenda - was an open question. It would mean a more direct involvement of citizens, but also raise a controversial issue of popular consultation besides the democratic ratification process.

Although the enlargement process is regarded as a success, certain participants considered it appropriate to contemplate a pause in the enlargement process to allow for a further deepening, which means making the EU fit for further enlargement. Yet, the majority considered it necessary to at least bring accession negotiations to an end with those countries with which they have already started.

The solution of problems arising from continuous enlargements may lie in differentiated membership schemes (concentric circles), which would allow to accommodate countries in the "Home Europe" which cannot or don't want to move as rapidly as others on the road of further integration. The participants did not underestimate the problems inherent with those schemes, but it was clear for everybody that it will no longer be possible that a minority of Member States would prevent others from moving forward. In particular some candidate countries may consider that this formula may lead to a lasting graduation among the Member States.

On the other hand some participants proposed to organise the neighbourhood policy with an approach of olympic rings, meaning that the EU would coordinate areas of collaboration with non-Member countries based on their geographical proximity and common interest.

There was widespread feeling that the citizens, the civil society, should have a bigger role in determining the future and size of the Union. Nevertheless the majority considered referenda not as an adequate mean to give the citizens a say in these matters, although many of them could accept referenda if they are as far as possible detached from national contexts and carried on the European level.

Many participants felt that more time and information would be necessary to prepare for further enlargements.

- **European neighbourhood policy**

There are more innovative ideas demanded to complete and deepen this strategic policy. Some people understand that the neighbourhood policy is actually a tool to cooperate with countries that will not be Members of the EU. On the other part the neighbourhood policy may be used as a "waiting room" for countries not regarded at the moment as candidate countries.

- **EU in the world**

European Citizens expect from the European Union to strengthen its capacity to act abroad. This policy is considered to be important to keep our stability, prosperity and security. An important step forward of the Reform Treaty is the introduction of the High Representative who will be the Vice-President of the Commission and at the same time will chair the External Relations' Council.

The majority of the participants felt that the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the single integrated external service will provide a substantial improvement in the coordination, development and coherence of the common external policy.

Certain aspects are less known to the public and less visible, but nonetheless very important, i.e. transfer of the visa and asylum policy under the scrutiny of the Parliament.

In spite of this progress there is a clear disappointment about the unanimity that is still kept in the EFSP field.

So far the EU has proven its influence through the means of the so called "soft power", which has also revealed its efficiency in the enlargement processes.

Regarding the situation in the world some participants wondered how a diplomatic corps can be a convincing power without military backup. So far the peacekeeping missions were not sufficient and the common defence policy should ensure that the EU has the ability to engage in this kind of missions when needed and under the UN mandate.

The European values, like democracy, tolerance, respect for diversity, freedom of mind and religion should be promoted in opposition to radical, totalitarian and fundamentalist ideologies.

The disappearance of the Union's symbols from the new text, an aspect which has a particular significance in relation with the rest of the world, was regretted.

- **development policy**

Development policy in the third world should pay more attention to the governance process in the recipient countries.

In order to facilitate the development projects the EU carries out, it should evaluate whether there are no actions in other EU policy areas that counter the development aid, like for instance the Common Agriculture Policy. Also the European Institutions acting in the field of development, humanitarian aid or human rights may better coordinate their actions in order to send clear messages and better achieve their goals.

WORKSHOP E "HORIZONS" FINAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 9th 2007

1. Ways of consulting and informing the people of Europe and enabling them to take decisions

1.1 Introduction: European citizens are not generally well informed about Europe. Therefore, if they are to take an active part in shaping the future of the Union, this needs to be rectified by means of a civic education programme, to be included in national education programmes, taking into account specific national circumstances.

1.2 Information: There is a demand for more information about Europe that is not being met by the media. Efforts must be made to convince them of the existence of this need, and therefore of the benefits of informing their respective audiences in a way that is adapted to each of them. In addition, we must not forget about the publications of civil society organisations, which spread such information among their members.

1.3 Workings: while bearing in mind that no organisation can claim to represent civil society as a whole, the Agora should be established as a permanent structure representing and consulting civil society within the European Parliament (how it would be integrated into the European Parliament, how it would be convened, how it would operate and its code of conduct remain to be defined). Its membership would vary depending on the subjects it deals with (thematic agoras bringing together people with specific areas of expertise). It would be complemented by national and regional agoras. It would have to be consulted before decisions were taken on any matter of concern to citizens and would have to be granted sufficient financial resources to ensure its long-term existence. The way it is organised should be subject to monitoring, evaluation and a feedback mechanism. Moreover, in order for civil society to be organised at European level, it would be necessary to ensure that the European association statute was finally adopted. All these measures will allow for a structured dialogue between all concerned.

1.4 Giving practical expression to participatory democracy: investing this Citizens' Agora with powers of proposal, as part of the discussion and decision-making process of the European institutions. This would give practical expression to a type of participatory democracy at Union level and demonstrate the political maturity of civil society.

2. Structure of European civil society and ways in which it can act

2.1 Citizens' Agora: civil society would become part of the institutional framework through being represented within the Citizens' Agora. It should create liaison bodies in order to provide it with proposals and points of view on a regular basis, through debates and a deliberative process.

2.2 Achieving sustainable competition: In order to promote public goods (health, social and territorial cohesion, solidarity, the right to a dignified existence), any form of competition likely to destroy them should be avoided. The European Parliament could prepare a declaration on the interdependence of European citizens to this effect.

2.3 A societal pact: current policies on the market, social protection and sustainable development are grossly imbalanced and suffer from a total lack of coherence. Parliament should take initiatives in the future to allow for a convention to be set up. The objective of this convention would be to draw up, in a participatory manner, a societal pact between those concerned, with the aim of integrating policies in a single framework, thereby ensuring their coherence. It has been proposed that it would be subject to a consultation held at the same time throughout the Union.

2.4 A real constitution: some are calling for Parliament to declare its support for the drafting of a real constitution that is concise and can be understood by all European citizens. Parliament could call for an ad hoc assembly to be set up with precise terms of reference to this effect. For various reasons, others do not support the idea of a constitution.

2.5 Right of European citizens to be consulted: Parliament could call for European citizens to be given the right to be consulted before any significant amendment to the Treaties or before the adoption of a true constitution. In addition to ratification by each of the Member States in line with their constitutional arrangements, such acts should also be subject to the approval of all European citizens by means of a European consultation held at the same time throughout the Union.

2.6 Charter of Fundamental Rights: Parliament should commit itself to ensuring that the Charter applies to all citizens of the Union without exception, and could prepare a solemn declaration to this effect. In this context, the most-favoured-nation clause should apply in the legislative field, particularly as regards gender.

2.7 Extension of the right of initiative: Parliament should call for a review of the Commission's virtually exclusive right of initiative and for its own to be strengthened and extended to civil society. The practical arrangements for implementing the right to petition of 'one million citizens from a significant number of Member States' should be clarified. The Citizens' Agora will serve as an observatory for monitoring the action taken by the Union's institutions as a follow-up to this right of initiative.

3. Simplifying the machinery of Europe's institutions and making its workings more transparent

A Citizens' Agora is a means of allowing the institutions to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with, and to consult, civil society. In this context, a clear distinction should be made between pressure groups and civil society, particularly when the Commission is organising expert consultations.