

"Hofstad" Lecture by Frits Bolkestein, Member of the European Commission  
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## **EUROPE AFTER NICE**

At Nice, the European Union reached its limits. Never had an Intergovernmental Conference lasted so long and produced so many decisions that led to so much confusion. Some awkward subjects were put back until the next Intergovernmental Conference scheduled before the end of 2004. Then we will once more have to do a bit of tinkering in order to prepare the European Institutions for the arrival of new Member States. This will not be an easy job, but it will be an important one. The form Europe adopts on that occasion will determine its future for many years, if not generations. If we make the wrong choice, disintegration and political paralysis will be lurking just around the corner.

The Nice European Council marked a turning point in many respects. It revealed the dangers threatening Europe if we do not opt for a clear and effective decision-making process. There were only fifteen Member States at the Nice Summit. What would meetings of that kind be like with twice that number?

### **Some observations**

I should therefore like to make a number of observations about Nice.

The first is that the efficiency of intergovernmental decision-making is in inverse proportion to the number of Member States around the table. The bigger the group, the more limited its decision-making powers. With the system it applies at present, the European Council runs the risk of turning into a sort of Congress of Vienna - the conference that worked on the restoration of Europe in 1814 and 1815. The conference of sovereign rulers was broken off when it transpired that Napoleon had returned from Elba to take on the established powers in Europe again. The Congress of Vienna was concluded after Napoleon had met his Waterloo. It lasted a long time because the participants were enjoying themselves and ended up having to attend to their business during the receptions and masked balls, behind the scenes and in the backrooms.

The French negotiator, Talleyrand, had the task of regaining a legitimate position for France in the Concert of Powers. He described the essence of the Congress as follows: "Europe's prime concern, and in fact its chief interest, is to banish doctrines that lead to domination. The principle of legitimacy must be re-established, as it is the only remedy for all the evils that have threatened Europe and the only way of preventing the evil from returning."

These words are just as valid today. Legitimacy is undermined in the absence of effectiveness. The European Union will lose its moral basis if it cannot reach decisions. At present, Europe can boast of a period of economic growth and prosperity, but we saw how precarious this growth is in September last year, when oil prices rose sharply and lorry blockades were set up throughout Western Europe. At this time of acute crisis Europe seemed to cease to exist. The individual Member States took matters into their own hands - particularly France, the country then holding the Presidency.

Where would the European Union stand if there were a lasting crisis? Intergovernmental decision-making would then be synonymous with political paralysis.

We may also observe a shift of emphasis in the European Union. Until now, the German/French axis has been central to European integration. Cooperation was stepped up over the past few decades because a generation of Heads of State from the two countries have known each other and have been well able to understand each other's position. Economic and monetary integration was promoted by Helmut Schmidt and Valérie Giscard D'Estaing, while Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand were the driving forces behind political integration. The style and substance of leadership in Europe has changed, however. France is preoccupied with its internal power structures, since the difference between the left and the centre-right is very small in that country. Leadership in Germany is, for the first time, in the hands of a post-war generation - people who are aware of the country's past but were not part of it. Germany is looking mainly to Central and Eastern Europe. At Nice, Germany spoke up for Poland, which was in danger of getting a raw deal in French Presidency proposals on the allocation of votes. Again, there was a risk of decisions being made about Poland without Poland itself having a say in the matter.

Strong political leadership in Europe is, therefore, a thing of the past. After the Nice summits, the French daily, *Le Monde*, ran the headline: "*L'Europe, la fin du jardin à la française*". France has always shaped European integration and above all the institutions. The spirit of European administration has been French, French has been the principal working language and Frenchmen have occupied key posts. In the past

decades, France took care of the ideas, Germany of the means and Italy of the flexibility of the structure. As Madeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State once put it: "To understand Europe, you have to be a genius or French."

Enlargement will cause the *jardin à la Française* - the French garden - to wither. The European institutions are now run by people of many nationalities. The French network is weakening, and English is steadily becoming the main working language. As Europe expands, more and more shifting alliances or '*single-issue coalitions*', are emerging. Where practical economic matters are at stake, France and Germany are increasingly ending up in different coalitions, since they have different economic philosophies. These shifting alliances give the United Kingdom an opportunity to play its traditional role as the power that marks the differences on the continent. Enlargement will also lead to shifts in emphasis.

My third observation concerns The Netherlands. The Netherlands must know where it stands. It instinctively regards itself as the smallest of the big countries, but the other Member States, both big and small, regard it as the biggest of the small countries. A good relationship between smaller Member States is of overriding importance. I am confident that the outstanding Benelux co-operation will substantiate the 29 votes which its three Member States combined have achieved in Nice.

A small Member State also has the right to defend its interests. A few years ago I tried to change the position of The Netherlands as, in relative terms, the biggest net contributor to the European Union's budget. Initially my efforts met with a great deal of criticism. The then Member of the European Parliament, Laurens Jan Brinkhorst,

even called it 'un-Dutch'. However, the Government took action and, at the Berlin Summit, the net position of the Netherlands was improved. That was in the national interest. The Netherlands is fully prepared to make its contribution to the European Union, but not to pay a much larger amount in relative terms than other countries.

I think the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg will need to cooperate closely in the Europe of the future. These countries might not have the same ideas about all the various issues, but as soon as it is a question of who calls the shots in Europe, or the relationship between the big countries and the small ones, Benelux will have to speak with a single voice. In the Europe of shifting alliances, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg will be able to achieve more if they join forces than if they go for it alone.

Fourth, according to some, Nice showed that the "Monnet approach" has reached its limit. I do not agree with that view. The advantage of the "Monnet approach" is that the ultimate aim of European integration is not defined but is a sort of open-ended arrangement. Jean Monnet was correct when he said that discussion of an ultimate aim for European integration would lead to speculations that would tend more to raise problems than to solve them. Monnet called, therefore, for a step-by-step integration of economic sectors without specifying where it was all leading. On 9 May 1950, France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, put it as follows: "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity."

The Nice Summit underlined the validity of this functional approach because European integration is only feasible if carried out step by step. The European version of a 'Big Leap Forward' would easily end up in disarray. In the functional approach Europe is not just a matter of pulling down barriers: a common policy is also needed in areas such as foreign and security policy, the fight against international crime, or asylum and immigration policy. The European edifice goes beyond mere economics, but we don't have any blueprints. However, if we do leave the track of the "Monnet approach" a debate about the ultimate aim of the European Union - its *'finalité politique'* - looms. Should the European Union develop into a federation or will it be more of a confederation? In other words, is it to be a "United States of Europe" or a "Europe of United States"? These sort of questions will quickly lead to a theoretical, if not theological discussion.

The real question to be asked concerns the methods to be used. Until now, there has been a combined intergovernmental and Community approach to European integration. The intergovernmental aspects are deeply rooted. The Governments of the Member States have their say in the Council of Ministers, and there is also the European Council - the meetings of Heads of State and Government - which has come to be an appeals board for the Council of Ministers and a collegiate body that maps out the broad lines of development for Europe.

The real Community Institutions are the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice, all of which have their own part to play. The Commission takes the initiative, Parliament approves or rejects it, and the Court of Justice pronounces on legal matters. The Community method guarantees that there is

a fair balance both between the institutions and between the big and small Member States, North and South, rich and poor, and regions that are prospering and those that are lagging behind economically.

Some people call for greater emphasis on intergovernmental cooperation at the expense of the Community approach - for example, by eroding the specific role of the European Commission and reducing its status to that of a secretariat for the Council. I think this would be a bad idea.

Finally, there is another important lesson: the fact that the legitimacy of European Union is not widely recognised by the general public. Until now, European integration has been perceived as a technocratic process that has made little impression on the public at large. Even though the European Union is the driving force behind employment and economic growth, it is not really making its mark - maybe partly because people have come to take its achievements for granted. We can detect a certain unease. The turnout at European elections is low. It is around 30% in The Netherlands and fluctuates around 50% in other Member States. In Denmark, a majority of the population - albeit a small one - rejected the idea of joining the euro area. The majority regarded closer European integration as a threat to their identity. Europe did not pay much attention to Denmark's "no". The unease remains but the show goes on. There was resentment in Austria at the European Union's attitude to the new government. Even though the Commission maintained an objective approach, some Member States tried to give Austria a ticking-off. When it became apparent that human rights were not in danger in Austria, the European Union had to climb down. However, in many of the smaller Member States the attitude towards Austria

reinforced the feeling that Europe was constantly interfering and giving its approval to violations of sovereignty.

After Nice we can see that the intergovernmental trade off of national interests does not lead to greater recognition of the Union's legitimacy. We need to do more than organise European summits that turn into media circuses or publishing glossy brochures.

### **Economic benefits**

My comments on the Nice European Council should not, however, lead to the conclusion that European integration has borne no fruit. Quite the reverse, I would say. The Member States of the European Union have experienced many years of economic growth, and The Netherlands is a prime example. Unemployment is falling, inflation is under control, the national debt is dropping and public budgets are in balance. The liberalisation of key sectors in Europe, such as air transport, telecommunications, and electricity and gas supply, together with new technologies, have given growth a powerful boost.

But we must not rest on our laurels. The Lisbon Summit stated that Europe's aim was "to become the most dynamic, competitive and knowledge-based economy within ten years". This means that sectors such as rail transport and the postal service, traditional bastions of public intervention, must be liberalised more quickly. It also means that in five year's time the European Union must have a single market in financial services, so that there can also be a free market for pension funds. I devote a lot of attention to these practical issues.

The European Union must continue to work on modernising its economic structures - in other words, on establishing a sound and firm economic basis. We will need a modern economy for the enlargement. Gross national product per head of population in the applicant countries of Central Europe is between 23% and 68% of the European average. These countries will be able to play a full part in the integration process if they too have a scenario of economic growth. If Europe's economy falters, the enlargement as an "economic project" will be jeopardised. Most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe already have ten years of economic reform behind them. There are many of what the Germans call "*Wendeopfer*" - victims of the change. The reform is a politically difficult and socially painful process. If the accession runs aground in economic terms, the "political project" will also be at risk.

### **Turning point**

After Nice, the European Union is at a turning point. It will have to come to a decision about its working methods and its core tasks. We always come back to the basic questions.

1. Should decision-making revert to the highly intergovernmental or in fact become more "*communautaire*"?
2. Should Europe concentrate on core tasks or should it deal with everything?

Over the past few months, these choices have been the subject of some interesting discussions between many people, such as Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs,

Joschka Fischer, the President of France, Jacques Chirac, the British premier, Tony Blair and the Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt.

The President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, gave his reaction in a speech to the European Parliament on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2001 in which he clearly referred to the Community method. He said: "I strongly believe in the Community method, its rationalisation, its clarity and its extension are the Union's future and not its past." Mr. Prodi stressed the importance of methodology.

Others jumped into blueprints. Joschka Fischer went furthest in putting the case for federalism or, as he described it on 12 May last year at the Humboldt University in Berlin, "the transition from the Union as an alliance of states to a European Federation with a fully-fledged parliament". He added that this was not the view of the German Government but a "personal vision of the future". He also called for a European Parliament with two chambers: one directly elected and one comprising representatives of the national parliaments. Fischer was also in favour of a European Government, in the shape of the Council or the European Commission.

Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs was immediately ridiculed by France's then Minister for the Interior, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who accused Fischer of harbouring dreams of the *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation* - the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. In an interview with the German newspaper, *Die Zeit*, Chevènement explained his strong words: "I wasn't entirely serious, to tell the truth. Because the concept of nations is Germany's bugbear, it tends to take refuge in post-nationalist ideas and a hankering after a sort of federation of regional entities a little along the lines of the Holy Roman Empire".

President Chirac gave a somewhat more objective reply to Fischer's call during a visit to Germany in June last year. He told the Bundestag: "Neither you nor we are working on setting up a European superstate to replace our nation states and to mark the end of them as the vehicles for international affairs."

Chirac contrasted Fischer's view of a federal Europe with the idea of a confederation. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, joined the debate with a speech he made in Warsaw in October last year, in which he said that Europe was the free Europe of independent sovereign states that bring their sovereignty together in striving to promote common interests, that we could achieve more together than individually and that, with its economic and political strength, a Europe of this kind could be a superpower, but not a superstate.

The Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, did his bit in September during a debate on Europe's ultimate goal. He called for a federal Europe without actually using the word, and particularly insisted on the Community approach. He expressed that the process would finally grind to a halt if there were no ultimate goal in view. He made himself more clearly in an interview with the Flemish weekly "*Knack*" after the Nice Summit: "I am prepared to risk criticism of the Union for the sake of a genuine federation complete with a government (the Commission) and a legislative authority. The Council of Ministers would meet almost permanently, perhaps several days per week. Two legislative chambers would be set up along the lines of the House of Representatives and the Senate in the United States. The system would work perfectly well in Europe."

Fischer and Verhofstadt call for a "United States of Europe", whereas Chirac and Blair have more of a "Europe of United States" in mind.

I have always had my objections to the resounding calls for a "federal Europe as final goal of European integration". I voiced them for the first time in September 1991 and came in for a lot of criticism. The vital question is whether it is possible to combine the continued existence of a nation-state with a federation. Countries such as France and the United Kingdom are old nation-states in Europe - countries with a language, culture and outlook of their own. For these countries, European integration has always been a question of national interest. The idea has never been to dissolve into a European State. The United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries see a federal Europe as a threat to their identity. Applicant states such as Poland and Hungary see Europe as a structure within which they can realise their own ambitions. The Polish nation was not a sovereign state for many years, and when it did become a state, its form was imposed by external powers. Hence the historical expression: "Polska tak, ale jaka?" - Poland yes, but what sort of Poland? For Poland, the European Union is a place for self-realisation, not for dissolving into an anonymous entity. Poland did not spend years wresting itself free from Moscow just to be subordinated to another central power. Nation-states and a federal Europe therefore do not mix.

I brought up this point in The Netherlands ten years ago, when European federalism was the fashionable thing, *par excellence*, to discuss. You do not hear much about it in The Netherlands nowadays. It would even be a risky business to work towards a federal Europe, since there is a good chance of failure, and Europe might then end up

on the road to disintegration as a kind of reaction. People who want to both federalise *and* enlarge Europe are on shaky grounds.

Fischer and Verhofstadt's call for a federal Europe is understandable. Their attitude stems from internal politics. In Germany, left-wing parties such as the Greens are uncomfortable with national feelings and the promotion of German interests. This stirs up feelings about the past, when nationalism formed the basis for Hitler's domination. Post-war Germany therefore became an imperfect nation-state: people took refuge in organised regionalism or European federalism. It is no coincidence that Fischer was speaking in a personal capacity.

In Belgium the problem is a little different. The country has three official languages, three regions and three communities. The Belgian Government is struggling with the problem of three cultural communities living together in a single state: Belgium is not a nation-state. In order to survive, Belgium moved in two directions: towards regionalism and towards European federalism. Europe became a place where it was thought that it might be possible to solve some of Belgium's problems. Italy has a similar problem in that the country in effect has a political, economic and cultural border between North and South. Calls for federalism are therefore heard primarily in Member States with a "nation problem".

I believe that a discussion about the final goal distracts from the real choices that have to be made. One should not resort to political romanticism in order to avoid the real world. In my field of Internal Market and Taxation I would rather see knotty problems solved than formulating far away designs about how Europe should look like in 20

years time. I prefer positive decisions on a European internal market for pension funds, on the liberalisation of postal services or on the introduction of qualified majority voting in the area of taxation over federal blue prints. A strong Community approach is appropriate with a goal of this kind, as it has an integrating effect. Intergovernmental decision-making is a recipe for political paralysis and therefore can not be the only solution to our problems.

Verhofstadt in particular is a great advocate of the Community approach, and I hope this will also become apparent if a "Laeken Declaration" is drawn up during the Belgian Presidency in the second half of this year.

In this Hofstad lecture I would say that I agree with Verhofstadt in this respect. Close cooperation in an enlarged Europe will not be possible without a Community approach in which the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice play their unique roles. The Commission will have to play a pivotal role in all the areas to which the European Union assigns the status of common interest. It will therefore have to be effective, thorough and bold - not a group of ambassadors, but the heart of the Community.

The European Parliament is the supervisory body, and it would be a good thing if it concentrated more on central policy issues than on incidents. It is more important for Europe that the conclusions of the Lisbon Summit are well implemented than that the EU's relations with the Vatican should be severed. I would confront the Dutch originators of the proposal to break off relations with the Holy See with a historical fact. Stalin once scornfully asked Churchill: "How many regiments does the Pope

have?" But in the end, it was a Polish Pope in the Vatican who pulled the carpet from under the feet of Marxism.

I can only commend the Court of Justice for its integrating work. Europe is a Community based on law, and the Court ensures that European law permeates the whole of government.

### **Core tasks**

Increasing integration ultimately brings us to the following question: which jobs are for the European Union and which for the Member States? The lack of a clear definition of priorities has brought an ever-increasing number of fields within Europe's remit. The division of competencies has become vague and in some fields even unnoticeable. The Maastricht Treaty established the principle of subsidiarity: "In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall take action ... only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States". Subsidiarity in fact is the application of the principle of proportionality, which is often preached but seldom practised. There is a danger of a creeping process: more and more things are becoming the subject of legislation in Brussels. Often these initiatives are requested by the European Parliament or the Council.

The Luxembourg Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, once called this a "system". He said: "We decide on something, leave it lying around, and wait and see what

happens. If no one kicks up a fuss, because most people don't understand what has been decided, we continue step by step until there is no more turning back."

European integration through the Community approach will lead to a clearer division of powers between the Union and the Member States, but this must not be at the expense of the exclusive competencies of the Union. A European Union with 25 to 35 Member States will be able to function only if it concentrates on core issues. It must limit itself to what is strictly necessary and do that well.

Like Mr. Prodi I advocate an open and structured debate on the future of Europe and its core tasks. The White Paper on Governance, which is due in July this year, will be an essential contribution of the Commission. The debate ought to focus in particular on the question 'who does what' and 'what is the relation between various policy levels in Europe'.

Fischer, Chirac, Blair, Prodi and Verhofstadt all call for a "*Kompetenzabgrenzung*" - a division of powers. In other words: what are these core tasks? In any case some essential tasks ought to be included, like for example:

- establishing a strong economic basis by means of a unified internal market and effective monitoring of fair competition;
- maintaining the stability of the euro;
- a common trade policy;
- a common agricultural policy;
- a common environmental policy;
- a foreign and security policy;

The Treaty as it now stands contains numerous provisions that would permit European policies on education, youth, vocational training, healthcare, employment, social affairs and culture. Every initiative has a legal basis in the Treaty.

In the "Laeken Declaration", Verhofstadt intends to outline the division of powers to be set out in a new Treaty in 2004. He intends to transfer some areas of competence, such as defence, to Europe, while returning some of the Union's tasks to the Member States - but he doesn't say which.

Division of powers is useful as a way of making the European Union concentrate on the core tasks, and I hope it will produce genuine results. If we are to have a Europe that concentrates on the central tasks, there must be a clear demarcation between what the Union must do and which jobs are for the Member States.

At the same time I would refer to a hidden danger in "*Kompetenzabgrenzung*". A division of powers might be misused by the advocates of intergovernmental decision-making as a way of taking exclusive competencies away from the Community.

### **Challenges**

If we are to meet the challenges of the coming years, we shall need a "Europe of core tasks", and a Europe that uses the Community approach.

First, it must provide the economic basis for growth and employment. The Heads of Government said in Lisbon that Europe must become the most dynamic and competitive economy within ten years. This means that we must make structural changes and get a move on with the liberalisation of sectors. If the governments of the Member States fail to act on what was decided in Lisbon, they will be sketching a hazy picture of a Union that says something but then does nothing. This insubstantial approach will do the euro no good.

Second, enlargement to include countries of Central and Eastern Europe is historically necessary but will be difficult in economic terms. The accession is scheduled around 2005. It must be clear from the outset that no places are guaranteed. The ticket for admission is economic reform. The applicant countries will be required to have adopted the "*acquis communautaire*" and to be able to apply it so that they can become part of the Internal Market. If countries join before they are economically ready for it, the existing "*acquis*" would be endangered and the Internal Market would be eroded. This would destroy the basis for growth. I can understand that an applicant country might need a transitional period in a given area, but transitional periods must be kept as short as possible.

Third, foreign and security policy must be clearly defined. The war in Kosovo demonstrated that Europe cannot act without the support of the United States. But Europe is also taking the easy way out, as it can hide behind the United States. Europe wants to raise its international profile. The Amsterdam Treaty brought a High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy into being. This function

comes under the Council. One might expect this task to be a matter for the European Commission in the long run.

Fourth, asylum-seekers and immigration will be the potentially big problem of the coming decade, and Member States will no longer be able to solve them alone. Ten years ago questions of immigration and "cultural minority policy" were taboo, nor was integration into society sufficiently consistent. Indeed, The Netherlands had the idea that integration was possible while retaining a cultural identity. Any other view was soon equated with racism. I see that in the meantime the government is doing what was taboo in those days. It is a good thing that the taboo has been broken, but this has not solved the problems.

Members of cultural minorities nowadays account for 8.8% of the Dutch population, and this figure is expected to rise to almost 14% by 2015. At present, almost one-third of the population of Amsterdam and Rotterdam belong to cultural minorities. In fifteen years' time they will be in the majority in those urban areas. This will be a source of enormous integration problems, and similar situations can be found in other urbanised areas of Europe. The problem of asylum-seekers and immigration is too big for Member States to deal with individually and a European dimension is therefore absolutely vital.

First of all we must decide what we want. There should always be room for political refugees but most of the people seeking asylum are doing so for economic reasons. The flow of asylum-seekers is turning into a flow of immigrants. One may wonder if Europe is turning into an immigration Union. Would-be immigrants to traditional

destinations such as Canada, the United States and Australia first have to meet certain requirements. They must be able to make a certain contribution to the economy on the basis of qualifications. Immigrants cannot just turn up. Whether or not they can enter a given country depends on the economic interests of that country. If the European Union turns into an immigration Union, the volume of the influx must be kept in check by means of qualitative requirements that are related to Europe's own economic realities and needs. However, if the flow of economic asylum-seekers turns into an uncontrolled flow of immigration, Europe will be importing poverty while the countries of origin would be losing a productive part of the population. That would not be good either for Europe or for the countries of origin, which would be having their economic strength sapped. When establishing a European policy on asylum-seekers and immigration we must, if necessary, have the courage to make what might be difficult choices on the basis of strict criteria. Above all, we must ensure that the European Union does not repeat the mistakes made by some Member States in the 1960s and 1970s.

I think it is more appropriate to improve labour participation in the European Union in order to cope with a possible shortage on the labour market than setting into motion a wave of immigration. In many Member States the degree of labour inactivity is still very high because of unemployment and incapacity to work. So, the priority is not immigration but a higher labour participation.

Finally, I would say a little more about the legitimacy of the European Union. This is a major problem that receives too little attention. The European Union is at risk of losing legitimacy at the same time as it gains in size. In times of crisis, that could cause it to implode.

Perhaps I might quote Talleyrand once more on the subject of legitimacy: "A legitimate government - be it monarchic or republican, determined by succession or elected, aristocratic or democratic – is always one whose existence, form and method have been consolidated and tested over many years."

The European Union has not been around for very long, and it seems to many people to be far removed from them. In times of crisis, people look to their own national governments, not to Brussels. The direct election of the European Parliament was seen as a way of increasing the legitimacy of Europe. The irony was that turnouts dropped as Parliament was given more and more powers. Proposals for changes to the Treaty run the risk of being rejected if they are the subject of a referendum in certain Member States.

Some people want to increase the legitimacy of the European Union by having the President of the European Commission directly elected. If this happens, we shall have two institutions with a direct mandate: the European Parliament and the European Commission. This would require a change in the basic structure, since at present the European Parliament can dismiss the Commission, but not vice versa. Perhaps it should be possible, for the sake of institutional balance, for the Commission to dismiss Parliament.

Direct election of the President of the Commission may be a way of raising the Commission's profile, but many questions still remain unanswered. The direct election of the European Parliament did not increase the legitimacy of that institution.

Would the election of the President of the Commission do any better? What if a President wants to put his or her election programme into practice and many of the Commissioners are against? Would a Commission President be able to survive politically without a firm majority in the European Parliament?

In the "Van der Leeuw" lecture, the Green Party leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit said on 11 November last year: "I propose the election of the 'President of the United States of Europe'." Are the people of Europe really waiting for a European Head of State? Such a person would have a great deal of power because of the nature of the position. Direct election sounds attractive, but it could have the wrong effect and further undermine Europe's legitimacy. In the process of European integration there is always a risk that good intentions may not produce the desired results.

The most important basis for legitimacy is effectiveness. All the rest is wishful thinking.

Let us, therefore, build the European Union above all on realities, with the necessary counterbalances to make up for our own weaknesses.

Let us limit the tasks of the European Union to core issues and systematically apply the Community method.

And above all, if we do something, let us do it well.

We can enhance the legitimacy of the European Union if we look less for good intentions and somewhat more for tangible results.

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