The Belgian Presidency of the European Union

The events of September 11th have completely changed the framework of international politics. The terrorist attack on the liberal way of life has made clear that no nation, however powerful it may be, can face such a challenge by itself. The need for further European integration has been made brutally obvious. The ELDR Council stresses its conviction that much greater capacity for integrated action, involving all the Member States and the EU institutions, is required. The first signal of the European Council of Laeken must be an effective basis for such an EU approach to international crises.

The shock of the terrorist attacks provides an opportunity to break the deadlock in the European institutional integration. Only if the European institutions work effectively can an integrated response become the instinctive response.

If a Common Foreign and Security Policy which merits it name is to develop, the artificial division of tasks between the High Representative for CFSP, the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and the acting President of the Council must be overcome. Furthermore, the mandate of the European Council in Laeken must contain the task to deal with institutional matters which the Treaty of Nice has not sufficiently solved. Qualified voting in Council should be the rule coupled with codecision rights of the European Parliament.

The second signal of Laeken is to set off the European Constitutional Process. The European Council in Laeken must produce the mandate for a well structured Convention not limited to the 4 points of the Nice “Declaration on the Future of the Union”. The ELDR Council calls for a convention process which is as democratic and transparent as possible. Therefore, the Convention itself should have a choice of working method and procedure. It must be composed of representatives of the European Council, Commission, Parliament and national parliaments, plus an independent President. The Convention must also include the Candidate States with their governmental and national parliament representatives as full active participants. The Convention must hold its meetings in public and create a common platform and agenda with well established rules of procedure for a wider debate on the complex issues involved. It should propose a text for the constitutional treaty with alternative options where unavoidable. The “cooling down” period after the Convention should be short to prevent dilution.

Furthermore, the ELDR Council calls for an early enlargement of the European Union on the basis of the Copenhagen Criteria and maintains its position that every state should be judged on its merits. It looks forward
to the contribution to be made by new member states to the building of a stronger European Union enjoying full democratic legitimacy and the loyalty of its citizens.

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