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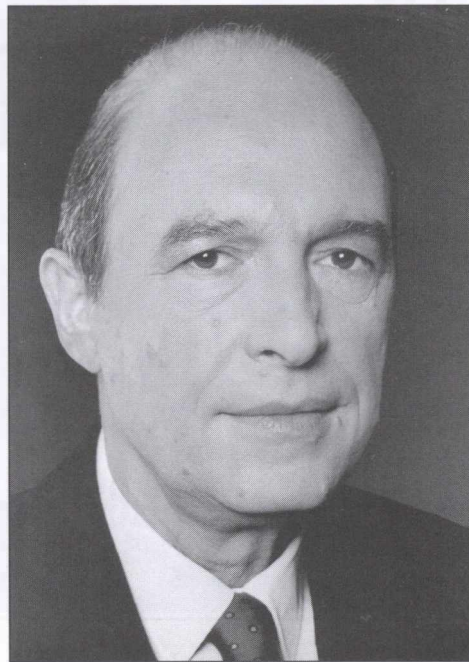
A Bigger EU Must Be More Effective and More Democratic

By Costas Simitis

On January 1, 2003, Greece assumed the Presidency of the European Union for what will certainly be a challenging six months at the helm. The European Union is at a critical juncture: It faces enormous challenges emanating from its own environment and dynamics, as well as from the wider international system. Combating terrorism and organized crime, if by far the most demanding, is only one of the international tasks ahead of us.

Enlarging the Union to include ten more countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean so as to unite the Continent and ensure stability, democracy and prosperity is another great challenge. Greece is determined to use its Presidency to contribute to furthering European integration and to strengthening ties

with the rest of the world, most particularly with the United States.



A well functioning Transatlantic relationship is indispensable for the smooth functioning

Costas Simitis has been Prime Minister of Greece since 1996. He previously served as Minister of Industry and Commerce, Minister of National Economy, and Minister of Agriculture. He was elected Member of Parliament for the port city of Piraeus in 1985, and has been re-elected in every election since. Having opposed the junta from exile in Germany between 1969 and 1974, he became a founding member of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), Greece's current ruling party.

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of the global system and is a prerequisite for global stability and prosperity.

Our vision is to help to make the European Union bigger by enlarging it, better by bringing it closer to the European citizen, and stronger by enhancing its role in the international system: a vast area of stability, democracy and prosperity in the world, a player for international cooperation, justice and sustainable development.

Greece has identified five priority areas for its Presidency. It will try to implement them in close cooperation with its partners, the next country to assume the Presidency, Italy, and the European institutions, especially the European Commission and the European Parliament. The five areas are:

- The enlargement of the European Union to include ten new members in Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean (Cyprus and Malta): Greece will make every effort to ensure that the admission of these countries proceeds smoothly according to the planned timetable.

The signing of the Act of Accession in Athens in April 2003 will mark the opening of a new phase in the evolution of the Union. Moreover, Greece will continue in earnest the negotiating process for the entry of Bulgaria and Romania and for bringing even closer the

prospect of Turkey's accession to the EU.

- The so-called Lisbon process, which involves the restructuring of the European economy to make the European Union the most competitive region of the world by 2010: The European Council scheduled for March 2003 will be devoted exclusively to this priority. The aim will be to instill new dynamism into the process, especially after the successful entry into circulation of the single currency, the Euro.

We will enhance EU's world role

- Migration, asylum, organized crime and external borders: The magnitude of these problems requires the development of a comprehensive EU policy. Greece, a country facing acute migration problems, will try to strengthen the European Union's policies while respecting fundamental democratic principles.

- External relations: Confronted with a very uncertain and volatile global system, the Greek Presidency will work to enhance the European Union's role in the world and to advance its relations with its international partners. We will pay special attention to the Balkans, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Russia and the Caucasus. The

Transatlantic relationship will be an area of utmost importance.

● The great debate about the future shape of the enlarged European Union, which is currently being conducted in the European Convention: It is expected that the European Council due to be held in Thessalonika in June will hold an in-depth discussion on the future of the European Union on the basis of the findings of the European Convention.

Citizens must approve EU's future plans

The Convention is a novelty, in both role and structure. It comprises not only representatives of governments and the EU institutions, but also members of the national Parliaments from the member states and the candidate countries. A large number of civil society and youth organizations have also been invited to contribute to the debate.

The composition of the Convention clearly embodies the principles of transparency and democratic participation – the underlying rationale being the need to obtain the consent not only of member governments but also of the peoples of the European Union.

But the method chosen may also prove a fast and efficient way of making progress on fundamental issues before the opening of the

next intergovernmental conference (IGC), which would give treaty status to any agreements on the European Union's future structure. The overall aim is to render the enlarged European Union more effective and more democratic.

The praesidium, or steering group, of the Convention has presented a draft outline of a possible constitutional treaty. This important development suggests the need for all member states to set out more clearly and systematically their views on the key issues on the agenda of institutional reform.

Our objective in the near future should be to work on a draft constitutional treaty that could make the enlarged European Union efficient and enable it to command the loyalty of its citizens and its member states. This requires a comprehensive approach that focuses not only on the necessary institutional arrangements, but also on the policies and financial instruments required to sustain enlargement.

In this connection, it is important to stress the need for the European Union to acquire the necessary common policies for addressing the real problems of all European citizens. It is equally important to strengthen macro-economic coordination in the context of economic and monetary union and endow the European Union with effective economic governance.

Greece maintains that in order to achieve all this we should build on the strengths of the European Union. We should draw from the experience of all the years of fruitful cooperation within the EU structures, based on the very principles that make the European Union a dynamic, continuously evolving, highly adaptable political union of equal member states.

In this context it is vital to ensure that the "Community method" is strengthened and that its significance for European integration is fully recognized. The Community method is the decision-making process through which the European Union has achieved improved policy coherence, more transparency and better chances to debate policy ideas while taking national interests into account. It entails a system of checks and balances that will prove invaluable to the enlarged European Union.

The relationship between the European Union and the member states should, of course, be clarified. The Convention has been given the mandate to examine the notion of "subsidiarity," under which decisions are taken at the most appropriate institutional level, whether local, regional, national or EU-wide, with the EU institutions responsible only for policies and actions that are best decided at EU level.

Greece believes that there is no substitute for trust among the institutions and among the member

states if the European Union is to function properly. A strict division of competences between the member states and the European Union through the adoption of a fixed, exhaustive list of powers, as sought by some Convention participants, could deprive the European Union of its ability to evolve and respond to new challenges.

National Parliaments should have more say

Involving national Parliaments directly in the European Union's decision-making procedures, by allowing them to check compliance with the principle of "subsidiarity," as some advocate, would hamper and delay the functioning of the European Union and could cause friction between the national Parliaments and their Governments. Furthermore, it could seriously inhibit the European Commission's right of initiative.

Greece agrees that ways should be found to bring national Parliaments closer to the European Union's decision-making so as to enhance its democratic legitimacy. A number of interesting ideas on how to achieve this within national political frameworks have been proposed at the Convention and should be given serious consideration.

We should not, however, favor the creation of a new institu-

tion consisting of members of national Parliaments, as some have proposed. This could not be reconciled with the need to simplify the acts and procedures of the European Union and would upset the present institutional balance, which is based on the smooth operation of the "institutional triangle" composed of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament.

Preserving this balance should always be at the forefront of our minds. We feel, therefore, that the idea that has been put forward of creating an elected president for the European Council would disturb the longstanding institutional equilibrium by giving too much power to the European Council and elevating it to the status of prime player.

The Presidency will have to be reformed

The shortcomings of such a development would be numerous. The European Council may have proven quite capable of drawing broad strategic guidelines, but it lacks sufficient checks and balances and the outcome of its deliberations is not sufficiently predictable.

The future of the Presidency of the Council is another important issue related to the need for institutional balance. Under the present system, each member state assumes the presidency of the council for six

months in turn. The advantages of this system are widely acknowledged, but enlargement will render it non-functional and diminish its value to the member states that occupy the presidential chair.

A number of different options have been proposed and should be thoroughly discussed. In evaluating them, Greece stresses the need to do everything possible to preserve certain fundamental principles, such as equality of all member states, as well as the traditional role of the Commission.

The institutions will also have to be modified in order to strengthen the European Union's capacity for external action. Until now the European Union's trade relations and development cooperation with third countries have been conducted on the basis of the Community method, while in other policy areas, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), member governments have played the predominant role.

This means that in the areas of trade and aid, and in some specific international bodies, the 15 member states operate with a single representative, but in all other areas of international relations the European Union has lacked the benefits of a legal personality. We must remedy this shortcoming.

The European Union's acquisition of a unified legal personal-

ity will fulfill the first and most essential prerequisite for a strong international presence. Without it, the common pursuit of collective and national interests, as well as the projection of the European Union's values of peace, democracy, solidarity, human rights and sustainable development, have little chance of success.

The adoption of a legal personality implies, of course, the abolition of the so-called pillar structure, which gives the EU institutions greater involvement in some areas of policy-making than in others. It would no longer be valid to distinguish between actions stemming from the Community method and those involving more intergovernmental decision-making.

A single voice abroad entails a single framework within the European Union. This does not, of course, imply an instant "communitarization" of the whole gamut of EU actions. It simply means leaving behind a theoretical construction that may have proven helpful in better defining the European Union's functioning, but has also become restrictive on the European Union's potential.

The creation of the post of High Representative for the CFSP has proven very valuable in ensuring a more unified high profile representation of the European Union abroad. We can build on this success by merging this post with that of the Commissioner for External

Relations. The bearer of the two offices could be the vice-president of the Commission.

Such a merger would have undeniable practical advantages: it would offer the European Union a single voice in the international system, it would ensure continuity, it would give the single representative access to the entire range of EU foreign policy instruments and resources, which for the moment remain divided according to the pillar system, and it would promote further synergies between the Council and the Commission.

Qualified Majority Voting should be used more often

We should also examine the possibility of complementing this measure with a wider use of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV), instead of consensus, in reaching jointly agreed viewpoints. The merits of this move are obvious: it would give the CFSP the added speed, efficiency and coherence that it needs.

On the other hand, member states may be wary of a procedure that would give priority to efficiency over their own national interests. We could examine ways of assuaging these apprehensions.

For instance, a decision to take external action with no military implications could be adopted by

QMV on a proposal from the Commission. Opt-out clauses could also be provided for specific cases. The idea hinges on the member states being willing and able to separate core national interests from areas of foreign policy where they could accept a more inclusive approach.

Common defense policy must be strengthened

As we strengthen the CFSP, we must also reinforce its defense element, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), which should be progressively developed into a system of collective solidarity. This is not simply a matter of prestige and credibility for the European Union's foreign policy.

More crucially, it would create the conditions necessary for the development of a coherent, wide-ranging foreign policy, by reassuring those member states with neutral status that have special concerns related to defense. Dealing effectively with such concerns would open the way to a more coherent and vigorous foreign policy.

Moreover, the enlarged European Union will need to extend the provisions of enhanced cooperation, under which some member states may agree to move ahead faster than the rest, to the ESDP. Given the great variety of defense priorities, capabilities and traditions among

members of the enlarged European Union, enhanced cooperation seems necessary for any real progress to be achieved in the ESDP.

The process of reform, like the functioning of the European Union, needs to engage its citizens and obtain their consent. Abstruse principles, like that of "subsidiarity," planned institutional arrangements and proposals relating to foreign policy or defense at the EU level do not have an immediate impact on most people's lives.

Through the Convention, therefore, we must aim to address and promote issues that are of real significance to European citizens. The creation of a genuine European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice can help to draw citizens closer to the European Union and add value to their daily lives.

Greece supports use of the Community method to ensure coherent, effective and transparent cooperation among EU police and judicial authorities. Our long-term objective should be the creation of a European area of justice and home affairs. The establishment of an EU border police and customs authority would greatly improve the European Union's ability to deal with cross-frontier crime and terrorism. It is important that these objectives are set out clearly in the new treaty.

We should also further develop the concept of EU citizen-

ship, with attached rights and duties, which would contribute to the creation of a collective identity compatible with the political nature of the European Union. Greece favors the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted in December 2000, into the new treaty as a legally binding document, recognizing and confirming the rights of European citizens.

The last word should be about the fundamental principle of solidarity among member states. This principle should underlie all EU actions, from economic and social policy to defense, especially now that we are forging ahead with enlargement. It is closely linked with the Community method, the idea of institutional balance and the need for social and economic cohesion. It deserves a mention in the new treaty. □