

A EUROPE OF EQUALS - POETTERING

Brussels, November 28, 2001

[Hans-Gert POETTERING, EPP-ED Group President: speaking in European Parliament debate on the preparation of the Laeken EU Summit, November 28, 2001]

"The summit in Laeken on 14 and 15 December 2001 can become a historic summit. Our Group has every confidence in the Belgian Presidency, because Belgium has always remained true to the ideals of European unification and Belgium has always represented the Community Europe. We don't want to see the governments of certain big countries in Europe ruling the roost. We want anyone to participate fully.



"You talked about enlargement, and in this context I would like to refer to the conferences that we in the EPP-ED, have had with sister parties in candidate countries. They left a great impression on me. You shouldn't give the impression that the countries, which next year are going to have to sign the treaties, will have to wait for those who are not yet ready, as suggested by the French Foreign Minister. Every country has to be judged on its own merits. It is on this basis that we see enlargement of the European Union taking place.

"In Laeken, we are going to be looking at Afghanistan. It is essential for the Al-Queda terrorist networks to be destroyed, but now we also have to create the foundation upon which the international community, including the European Union, including the USA, including the Arab and Islamic world, can give help to Afghanistan, so a truly humane society can be established there, and there can be a government in Kabul which takes account of human rights and the rights of women.

"Now turning to the Middle East, we will call upon all participants to go back to the negotiation table. We deeply regret, and I am going to moderate my language here, when saying this, the way the Israeli Premier treated visitors from the European Union, when President in Office, Mr. Guy Verhofstadt was there, President of the Commission Mr. Prodi was there, Foreign Minister, President of the Office of Council Mr. Michel was there and so was Mr. Solana. We don't have any sympathy for the way that they were received.

"The courageous Council and Commission should stick to path that we have begun to follow. We will always defend Israel, as we have in the past, but the people of Palestine have a right to human dignity and a right to live in security too. The same rights as the Israelis expect.

"Let me make a couple of comments about the Convention. I would ask you, President in Office of Council, to bring all your influence to bear, to ensure that the fifteen representatives, who will participate in the work of the Convention, and who, once a decision is taking, will stick to that decision and will be bound by it, so the governments will have to respect the outcome of the Convention. The Convention is not a seminar. I can understand, that the governments still want to say yes or no to the

results, but I do think that the results should be binding on governments.

"The most experienced and best personalities should therefore participate in the work of the Convention, so that we really do end up with a set of results. I would also ask you to bring your influence to bear, as Mr. Prodi has said already, so we can start off the work of the Convention as soon as possible in 2002 under the Spanish Presidency in February or in the beginning of March, so that at the end of 2003, under the Italian Presidency, the work can be concluded. This would mean that a new treaty would be ready for signing, and we in Parliament would have an opportunity to debate it.

"President in Office of Council, the reason why I am making this point, is because I am firmly convinced that Laeken is a summit of the highest importance, because in Laeken we have to look at the future orientation of the European Union, as to whether we want to move along similar lines to this mini-summit in London, where seven countries participated, eight didn't and the Commission wasn't represented at all. We don't envisage a Europe like that, we want a Community Europe. We hope, President in Office of Council and President of the Commission, that you will express this sentiment in Laeken, because if you do, you will enjoy our full backing."