Public Opinion and the debate on the future of the EU

MONDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2002
FUNDACIÓN CARLOS DE AMBERES
MADRID

Summary of debates

A conference organised by Friends of Europe, Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos and the Association of European Journalists

In partnership with the European Commission
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Executive Summary

Speaking at the Conference entitled Public Opinion and the debate on the future of the EU at Madrid’s ‘Fundación Carlos de Amberes’ on November 4, 2002, Ana Palacio, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, described the European Convention’s work as a “revolution in the development of public international law”. Not all of the panellists shared this view, with the Financial Times’ Quentin Peel commenting that the current discussions featured the “usual horse-trading”. During the debate, however, it became apparent that the Convention represents a unique chance to resolve some of the problems besetting the European Union.

Information and the role of the citizen

A major difficulty highlighted at the conference was the problem of making European issues more understandable and more relevant to its citizens. Peel was one of the speakers making this point, while Carlos-Louis Alvarez, President of the Association of European Journalists, argued that “specialists had captured the idea of Europe” and that, subsequently, citizens were unaware of the issues. Minister Palacio concurred noting that Europeans often felt a sense of frustration, as they were not sufficiently included in the debate. Lluis Bassets, Deputy Director of El País, felt that this was due to the lack of a ‘European’ media and that news was presented along national lines.

Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe and an EU affairs columnist for the International Herald Tribune, joined Peel to decry the lack of personalities and to suggest that if the media presented European news in the same fashion that they reported national news these champions may yet emerge.

The Convention

Ana Palacio suggested that the answer to the information deficit lay in the workings of the Convention. Palacio welcomed the public nature of the debate and saw the debate as a way of realising the hopes and aspirations of the member states and applicant countries.
Disagreeing, Peel claimed that the real decisions were being taken behind closed doors work and this point found favour with José M. Areilza, Member of the Editorial Committee of Group Correo, who called for a genuine debate to avoid the results of the Convention being imposed from the top.

Merritt called for more exposure of the Convention’s workings, as it was currently “one of Europe’s best kept secrets”. Robert Cox, a Friends of Europe Trustee and former European Commission Representative in Turkey, called for a parallel debate on both the Convention and on the key issues of the day, and looked towards the real objective; “a Europe that works”.

**Social Europe**

Although the workings of the Convention were criticised, Jaime Montalvo, President of the Spanish Economic and Social Council, saw it as a way of bringing together the social and economic aspects of European society. Arguing that social Europe still needed to be defined, Antonio Gutiérrez, Former Secretary General of the Trade Union Comisiones Obreras, called for a “redistribution of wealth and jobs”. Taking a more practical stance, John Morley, Adviser to the Director General for Employment and Social Affairs at the European Commission, analysed the differences between the United States and European social models, and concluded that the answer lay in getting more Europeans into the job market. This action would also address the need to develop sustainable pension systems within Europe.

Several speakers argued that the Lisbon Strategy (based on the free market, liberalisation and the creation of an information society) had failed but Morley disagreed, claiming that it was the economic policies that had come to nothing and had led only to “non-growth and instability”.
**Defence**

**Joachim Bitterlich**, Outgoing German Ambassador to Spain and formerly Foreign Policy Adviser to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, expressed disappointment that Europe had not been able to present a united front in its dealings with the United States after September 11th. For Bitterlich, the United States and Europe should have met to agree a common strategy. This had not happened and Bitterlich now called for “courageous steps”.

This led to a discussion on the leadership in the area of European foreign policy and defence with **Alfonso Dastis**, Spanish Secretary General for European Affairs, calling for a “figure of authority” and Bitterlich suggesting the need for authoritative figures in each of the key policy areas.

In partial agreement, **Manuel Marín**, Member of the Congress of Deputies and former Vice-President of the European Commission, argued that there were indeed key issues that should be addressed at the European level, such as foreign policy and defence, but that other policies were best addressed nationally. “We are possibly asking too much of Europe, said Marin, “and much of the debate is of no interest to its citizens.”

**Javier Jiménez-Ugarte** argued that the future ESDP depends now very much on the work to be done by the Convention on the future of Europe. Present proposals of its members reflect a growing European public opinion in favour of a strong ESDP.
About the Conference

The conference Public Opinion and the debate on the future of the EU was held in Madrid on November 4, 2002 at the ‘Fundación Carlos de Amberes’. The event was co-organised by Friends of Europe, Real Instituto Elcano, the Association of European Journalists and the European Commission. Some 170 participants were present at the event, representing governments, European Institutions, NGOs, business and the media.

Opening the conference, Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe, welcomed Eduardo Serra, President of Real Instituto Elcano, Carlos-Louis Alvarez, President of the Association of European Journalists and the keynote speaker, Ana Palacio, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs. Merritt also acknowledged the support of the European Commission as well as Friends of Europe’s co-organisers, Real Instituto Elcano and the Association of European Journalists.

In his opening remarks, Alvarez noted that the Association of European Journalists had always covered European matters in-depth and that this conference underlined the organisation’s constant support in favour of the European idea.

For Alvarez, the main focus of the day was on ‘Europe and information’. He argued that specialists have captured the idea of Europe and that subsequently, its citizens are not always aware of the efforts made by leaders and institutions. According to Alvarez, there needs to be a single thrust that will allow the citizens to understand the current situation as Europe moves from a primarily economic role to a political one, thanks to the creation of a Constitution.

“Aside from the difficult concepts, we must increase awareness about the real feeling of Europe”, said Alvarez. “Only in that way can we succeed.”
Eduardo Serra, President of Real Instituto Elcano, introduced Ana Palacio, saying that her presence was particularly appropriate as she was both a former Member of the European Parliament and a Member of the Convention. Serra added that the Minister was a committed European and wanted to move forward in a way that best suited Spanish interests. Adding that there was still a need in Spain to define the shape of a future Europe, Serra concluded by stating that “Spain, and its citizens, had a legitimate right to defend its own interests”.
Conference Programme

Opening Address by Ana Palacio, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

First Session: Will Europe’s media decide the Convention’s outcome?

Moderated by Miguel Ángel Aguilar, the session asked if the European media hold the key to the EU’s future, given the Convention’s promise of a “wider debate” involving Europe’s citizens. How can TV and newspapers across Europe play a positive role in this process? Europe’s national media have very different styles of reporting EU news, ranging from the hostile British and increasingly sceptical German journalists’ coverage to the much more positive Spanish and Italian approaches; what lessons can be drawn from these, and does the European media’s generally positive reporting of the switchover to the euro offer any pointers?

The speakers were: José M. Areilza, Member of the Editorial Committee, Group Correo; Lluis Bassets, Deputy Director, El Pais; Giles Merritt, EU affairs columnist, International Herald Tribune and Secretary General, Friends of Europe and Quentin Peel, International Affairs Editor, Financial Times.

Second Session: Should the goals of “Social Europe” be re-defined?

This session was moderated by Giles Merritt, Secretary General, Friends of Europe, the speakers were: Antonio Gutiérrez, Former Secretary General, Trade Union Comisiones Obreras; Jaime Montalvo, President, Economic and Social Council, Spain and John Morley, Adviser to the Director General for Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission.

The session looked at the need to integrate non-European ethnic communities into the fabric of European society, a need underlined by September 11 and its aftermath. In parallel with the economic and industrial goals that were reaffirmed at Barcelona, does the EU now need to give fresh vigour to “Social Europe”? Immigration pressures on EU countries are unlikely to decrease, and in any case demographers warn that Europe’s ageing population cannot
meet its future labour needs. What is the policy mix that can link the EU’s Justice and Home Affairs concerns with positive new social policies?

Session Three: What do Europeans want the EU to be able to do for itself?

This session was moderated by Charles Powell, Senior Analyst, Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos, and asked what the EU should be doing for itself in the wake of the 11th of September and the war in Afghanistan. Although Europeans have become more concerned about their ability to defend themselves from new modes of terrorism, many fear that Europe will become increasingly irrelevant to the US as an ally due to its modest military clout. In addition, taxpayers are unlikely to look favourably on increases in defence spending. In this context, what should be done to make the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (and the European Security and Defence Policy) more relevant to citizens’ concerns?

Speakers were: Joachim Bitterlich, Outgoing German Ambassador to Spain and Foreign Policy Adviser to Chancellor Helmut Kohl; Robert Cox, Friends of Europe Trustee and former European Commission Representative in Turkey; Alfonso Dastis, Secretary General for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain; Javier Jiménez Ugarte, Secretary General of Defence Policy, Spain and Manuel Marín, Member of the Congress of Deputies and former Vice-President, European Commission.
Opening address by Ana Palacio

Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Palacio, opened her remarks by outlining two of the major challenges facing Europe. The first was determining how the EU could function with an enlarged community of 27 member states and the second was deciding how to react to recent trends, as illustrated by the first round of the French Presidential elections and the recent polls in the Netherlands.

In parallel with meeting these challenges, the Minister stressed the need to ensure that citizens understand what is happening in Europe. “At the current time”, she stated, “there is interest combined with a sense of frustration.”

For the Minister, answers to these problems lie with the work of the Convention. Describing this as “a revolution in public international law”, Palacio stressed that the debate was not happening “behind closed doors”, but rather, as a “live out-in-the open forum.” The Minister foresees a different style of international law making in the future, and used the introduction of the euro as an example of how Europe, and its citizens, can take on new ideas and concepts.

Although the Minister sees the development of the Convention as a risky undertaking, Palacio sees it as a way of realising the hopes and aspirations of the member states and the applicant countries. “There is acceptance that the Constitution will happen; unlike others, it will be a Constitutional Treaty of member states.”

While admitting that it would be hard to get consensus on issues such as economic and foreign policy, the Minister saw the positive side of eventual institutional reform. Palacio described the rotational presidencies as an “historic” process, which had led to a lack of cohesion in the past. According to the Minister, this lack of stability meant that the EU had sometimes failed to get its message across.
Reminding the audience of the progress made in the last six months, the Minister said that Europe had “moved from a market to a Constitution and that this was a revolutionary step.”
SESSION I: Will Europe’s media decide the Convention’s outcome?

The first session, moderated by Miguel Ángel Aguilar, looked at the role of the media in taking the debate on the future of Europe to its citizens. In his opening remarks, Aguilar wondered if a real European media existed, as opposed to the widely differing views expressed in the national press.

Opening the debate, Lluis Bassets insisted that the media “would not determine the outcome of the Convention”. Noting that the Minister had been positive, Bassets reminded his audience that taking the Convention close to the citizens of Europe was something of a “utopian dream”. For Bassets, the introduction of the euro had succeeded because that process had had tangible results, which were easily understood by the public. The Convention, however, is proving to be a much harder concept to grasp.

“Furthermore”, added Bassets, “during the debate, the citizens will see the worse aspects of Europe, with nationalistic aims and objectives coming to the fore.” Bassets asked if perhaps Europe has been “too ambitious”, and that was why the citizens were often presented with intangible results.

On the positive side, Bassets welcomed both the end of the rotating presidencies, as individual nations had tended to take advantage of the situation, and the potential participation of citizens in the development of the Convention. However, in agreement with Aguilar, Bassets concluded by saying that as no European media actually exists, it is somewhat difficult to take a reading of European public opinion.

Quentin Peel welcomed the idea of bringing citizens closer to the debate, but stressed that Europe “was not working”, and that the current discussions featured the “usual suspects” and the “familiar horse-trading”. “It is not a lively debate”, said Peel, “as the real work (in the Residium and in the various working groups) is taking place behind closed doors.”
For Peel, the role of the media is to make Europe more understandable to its citizens. The problem though, according to Peel, is that phrases like “Constitutional treaties” immediately inform the public that this is a complex matter.

Peel sees unlikely allies in the Euro-sceptics. He feels they have been responsible for the existence of meaningful debates in the UK, concerning the euro, and in Ireland, on the subject of the Nice Treaty. Peel’s solution is to move the discussion on to organisation and achievements rather than policies, adding that the debate should be about “greater democracy rather than improved efficiency”.

“The media wants heroes”, demanded Peel, “and a passionate debate that’s relevant to the man in the street.”

While insisting that the media wanted the active participation of European citizens in the debate, José M. de Areilza, believes that the text of the Convention could be imposed top-down with a resulting exclusion of the views of the applicant countries, who risk becoming “second-class citizens” in the Europe of 25.

Areilza called for a genuine debate, adding that the current draft Convention is a work of “fragments and patches” that still lacks real vision. He likened the current debate to that concerning the enlargement process, which Areilza described as an “exercise in the politically correct” with no-one expressing any serious doubts in the public arena.

Turning to events closer to home, Areilza expressed fears that Spain would become somewhat isolated in an expanded Europe. With its support for the Stability Pact and its backing for the European Commission as a “real engine”, Spain is becoming short of natural allies. With potential economic cutbacks, Spanish public opinion could become hostile towards Europe and only genuine progress in the areas of European democracy and cooperation in justice and home affairs could avoid this.
In opposition to his fellow speakers, **Giles Merritt** thought that the media could impact the future of Europe. “Indeed”, he added. “If the press is the voice of the people, it must have an influence on Europe’s future.”

Merritt described the Convention as “one of Europe’s best kept secrets”. Comparing it to the introduction of the ‘Code Napoleon’ and the work of the USA’s ‘Founding Fathers’, Merritt stated that Minister Palacio’s revolution was not making the headlines.

Despite this, Merritt welcomed the openness of a debate that has seen NGOs, human rights organisations and industry join the discussions along with governments and the European institutions. Merritt also welcomed Convention President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s proposal for a semi-permanent congress that could actually become “a permanent embarrassment” for those same institutions.

In agreement with Peel, Merritt decried the lack of real European personalities and called for the national press to report the important decisions of the day. “We do not need more anti-EU stories”, concluded Merritt. “We need to treat Europe in the same way that we inform citizens about national issues.”

Later, from the floor, **José Moises Martin Carretero**, Asociación para la Cooperación con el Sur, said that he had found the first round of discussions of the Convention somewhat “rigid” and that there had not been a real forum for debate. Moisés Martín asked for greater recognition of NGOs and environmental groups, adding that the *missing heroes* might be found in these constituencies.

**Jaime Montalvo**, President, Economic and Social Council, Spain, agreed with the comments from the floor but stressed that it was the responsibility of governments to start the process by “defining the rules of the game”. Volunteer organisations and NGOs could then play their part. In this way, citizens could participate fully in the European debate.
SESSION II: Should the goals of “Social Europe” be re-defined?

Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe took the chair for the second session, which asked if the EU needs to give fresh vigour to “Social Europe”?

Both Antonio Gutiérrez, Former Secretary General, Trade Union Comisiones Obreras, and Jaime Montalvo, President, Economic and Social Council, Spain, called for an open debate on the issues of social policy facing Europe in the 21st Century. Gutiérrez stated that social Europe “has still to be defined” while Montalvo called for the different social players to be allowed to reach agreement “on the global aspects of social Europe”. John Morley, Adviser to the Director General for Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission, argued that the best way of solving the social problems was to bring more people into the European labour market, adding that this would also tackle the problems expressed in regard to sustaining a viable pension system. Several speakers argued that the problems of immigration were being exaggerated and that if real efforts were made, this could prove an opportunity to deal with some of Europe’s social ills.

Acknowledging that progress had been made towards facilitating social cohesion within Europe in both the Amsterdam and Nice treaties, Montalvo looked to the Convention to bring together the social and economic aspects of European society. Montalvo also questioned if the social question had been given sufficient importance in the European debate. He reviewed several aspects:

- the institutional framework: the social aspects of Europe are only now being addressed, these are a series of “open proposals” within the debates surrounding the creation of a European Constitution, but a body of opinion is against reinforcing the concept of social Europe within the Constitution itself.
• *Europe’s ageing population:* there is a need to ensure “proper pensions for all Europeans” and “a sustainable pension system that eliminates the elements that stimulated early retirement”.

• *Immigration:* Although Spain has relatively few immigrants, the rate is increasing and many are attracted by Spain’s position as a “frontier country”. A “massive influx of immigrants” could cause problems for both Europe and the third world, as often immigrants are those with the most initiative. An immigration policy is needed that avoids exploitation and facilitates the adjustment of workers within national systems.

Morley analysed Europe’s expensive social model and ageing population in comparison with the United States. Noting that the percentage of GDP spent on social aspects (health, pensions, child care,) was similar at around 25 percent, in both continents, and that productivity rates were similar, Morley argued that the fundamental difference was the “number of people in employment, especially women, and men over 50”.

Arguing that an increase in the working population would also solve the problems surrounding the pensions crisis, Morley added that there was a demographic imbalance, caused by a fall in the European birth-rates.

Turning to immigration, Morley stated that this was due to under-development in countries outside of the EU. “The immigration problem is exaggerated,” said Morley, “as there are approximately 700,000 immigrants per year compared with a total population of 400 million.” Adding that there is little movement between member states, as people prefer to work at home, Morley said there were two key issues:

• The complex situation in regard to the development of North Africa
• The need to develop the labour market and the social systems.

Concluding, Morley said that as well as focussing on economic growth, there was a need to ensure equal opportunities and social inclusion so that incoming workers could have a realistic chance of entering the labour market.
For Gutiérrez, social Europe needs to be defined, as it is currently “a combination of national welfare systems.” Arguing that the pillars on which the original welfare state were built “have now crumbled”, Gutiérrez called for a “redistribution of wealth and jobs”.

In support of this, Gutiérrez listed the requirements for improving social cohesiveness in Europe:

- national and supra-national collective bargaining
- supra-national policies, that articulate the social fabric, behind the euro
- an equitable redistribution of wealth

Agreeing with Morley, Gutiérrez said that the scale of immigration was exaggerated and that it was not something to be avoided, as it would bring “more positive aspects than negative ones.” Gutiérrez called for Europe to create policies that improve economic growth. He added that this would be difficult after the enlargement of the European Union and that there was a parallel need to co-operate with countries outside of the EU, where conditions were considerably worse.

From the floor, Charles Powell, Senior Analyst, Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos, asked if the Lisbon Strategy was actually playing a role in the European response to globalisation, and if the European social model was compatible with Lisbon.

In response, Montalvo said that the Lisbon Strategy had failed throughout Europe, not only due to deficiencies in the labour market but also due to a lack of training. According to Montalvo, the strategy had failed to bring women into the employment market and had failed to improve the situation in regard to the application of long duration contracts.

In agreement, Gutiérrez said that the goals of Lisbon had been incompatible with the actual situation and that without significant changes to taxation system the goals of Lisbon could be regarded as “wishful thinking”.

Disagreeing totally with these viewpoints, Morley said that this just emphasised that the European Commission had failed to get its message across. According to Morley, over 5 million additional jobs were created in the first two years following Lisbon, 60 per cent of which had been taken by women, and 70 per cent of which had been in knowledge-intensive areas.

Morley added that the failure has been on the economic policy front, which has now resulted in a period of “non-growth and instability.” In reply, Montalvo said that the Lisbon Strategy had not been poorly designed but needed adjustment to meet the current situation, and that this policy had started at the Barcelona Summit.
SESSION III: What do Europeans want the EU to be able to do for itself?

The third session was moderated by Charles Powell, of the Real Instituto Elcano. It discussed how Europe could address the growing demand, detected in the debate surrounding the Convention and in various recently published Euro-barometers, for action in the fields of foreign affairs and defence.

The panel responded with a series of suggestions that reflected the EU’s own current debate on its future, in that several ideas were presented in which there was hardly any agreement.

Manuel Marin, Member of Spain’s Congress of Deputies and former Vice-President, European Commission, said that Europe’s citizens were bored with the debate and recommended that rather than asking “what should be done?”, we should ask “why don’t we do something?” Javier Jiménez Ugarte, Spain’s Secretary General of Defence Policy, asked for more contributions from the citizens while Alfonso Dastis, Spain’s Secretary General for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said there were “too many cooks” involved and that a “figure of authority” was needed. Joachim Bitterlich, Outgoing German Ambassador to Spain and Foreign Policy Adviser to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, expressed disappointment with Europe’s response to September 11th and called for Europe to develop a genuine strategy and take courageous steps. Robert Cox, Friends of Europe Trustee and former European Commission Representative in Turkey simply asked for a “Europe that works”.

Cox’s theme was competence, as this was what citizens wanted from the results of any election. Cox explained that the Friends of Europe wanted to avoid the somewhat hackneyed debate over the relative merits of a federal or non-federal Europe and focus on one “that works”. This could be done, Cox argued, by initiating a parallel debate on the future of the Convention and on the key issues of the day. In this way, citizens would become more aware that
the Convention was a means of addressing those same issues. For Cox, the debate on the Convention should produce a Constitution that is uncomplicated, accepted by the citizens, democratic and backed by a powerful executive.

Cox argued that while it is too easy for critics to say “it’s the fault of Brussels”, it is unclear where power lies within Europe, and for European and national parliaments to identify their respective roles. Cox outlined work being done by the Friends of Europe, in an unpublished paper, that called for the final policy-making body to be a European Council with a President. The European Commission would then have the role of preparing the work of the European Council and managing the results of what had been agreed. “We should not reject the idea of a European Government as we must blame ourselves if Europe does not work”, concluded Cox.

Marin stated that many of the discussions surrounding the future of Europe had been argued “ad nauseam”. For Marin it is obvious to the ordinary citizen that in the realms of defence and foreign policy, Europe should have a single voice, a common thrust and a unified image abroad. However, this is patently not working, as shown by Europe’s many voices within the United Nations. As a similar situation exists in the various economic fora (EMU, Bretton-Woods, IMF, …), Marin argued that it is “not realistic or pragmatic for Europe to speak with one voice”. Marin evoked Former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s comment on the subject, “‘Who do I call when I want to get Europe on the phone?’

Looking for solutions, Marin argued that Europe was being asked to act as a mother figure and that we are possibly “asking too much of Europe”. Based on his experiences of both national and European politics, Marin argued that much of the European debate is of no interest to its citizens. Better, he surmised, to identify the key issues that should be handled at the European level, such as foreign policy and defence, and leave other matters to national governments.
For Bitterlich, events such as September 11\textsuperscript{th} and other conflicts, mean that the EU’s credibility is at stake, both internally and externally. In his opinion, there should have been a meeting, in the wake of September 11\textsuperscript{th}, between the United States and Europe to develop a common strategy in the fight against terrorism. This never happened, commented Bitterlich and we had to be satisfied with a beauty contest directed towards Washington and New York.

Listing the problems that exist in the area of security and foreign policy (lack of real intelligence gathering, lack of co-operation, lack of response to the idea of the rapid reaction force, lack of strategy in the Middle East and, in Spain, towards the Maghreb), Bitterlich asked for courageous steps to be taken in order to develop a real strategy in this complex area.

Jiménez Ugarte called for citizens to be more involved in the discussion and suggested that this could be achieved by making the debate bottom-up as well as, as is the current situation, top-down. Jiménez Ugarte argued that while progress had been made in the fields of security and foreign policy during Spain’s Presidency, there had been problems between the EU and NATO, between Greece and Turkey and with member states who were opposed to the idea of joint European actions in these areas. For Jiménez Ugarte, the Convention was Europe’s main hope for the development of a common defence and foreign policy.

Looking at the difficulties existing in regard to the creation of such a policy, Dastis insisted that these included the need for unanimous agreement before progress could be made and the lack of the means to make such progress happen.

Quoting Pierre de Boissieu, Deputy Secretary-General of the Council, Europe, Dastis noted that the EU spends only 4 million euros more on defence than the amount spent on cleaning the Commission’s offices. Dastis called for a “figure of authority” to be put in charge. If this meant merging the offices of the EU’s High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and the
Commissioner for External Relations, Dastis argued that this should be achieved within the Council.

During the Q&A session, Peel asked if we were being too critical of our progress towards a common foreign policy, as the policy of the United States is just as incoherent. Peel added that it had actually been useful for the UK and France to have conflicting policies towards Iraq as this had helped the negotiations with the United States. In response, Bitterlich agreed that the United States situation was far from perfect, but insisted that this made it more imperative that Europe forged a common defence and foreign policy. Hoping for more assistance from the United Nations and NATO, he added, “It may be a dream, but we need a vision in order to make any progress at all.”

Gonzalo Ceballos of the Spanish-Atlantic Association asked for citizens to be more informed about the European defence debate, but in response Marin said that there is interest in national affairs but not in European matters. Turning to Turkey, Fernando de Salas, Society of International Studies, asked for comments from the panel on that country’s situation, adding that Greece had systematically opposed its entry into the EU for 20 years.

Cox was positive about the outcome of the recent elections in Turkey. He hoped that there could be a coalition between the two main parties, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the People’s Republican Party (CHP). Cox was of the opinion that the current situation could provide the chance “for a major breakthrough”.

Returning to the issue of leadership in Europe, Merritt warned that it was fraught with problems and could lead to a Lilliputian-style management being installed, owing to the blocking effect of the major powers in Europe. Nevertheless, Merritt saw the benefits of a European President.

Bitterlich was opposed to the idea as he saw little added value. He indicated a preference for leaders to be elected in the three key policy areas, those of
defence, economic policy and home & justice, so that Europe would have a powerful spokesman in these sectors.