

Folketingets Europaudvalg

Christiansborg, den 25. april 2002

Europaudvalgets sekretariat

Til

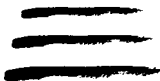
udvalgets medlemmer og stedfortrædere

**Konklusioner fra National Forum on Europe's
samling den 21. marts 2002**

Til orientering omdeles konklusioner truffet på National Forum on Europe's
samling den 21. marts 2002.

Med venlig hilsen

Peter Riis



Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen
President of the European Affairs Committee,
Folketinget, Christiansborg, 1240 Kobenhavn K, Danmark

26/03/03

Dear Mr. Larsen-Jensen,

Now that we have concluded the second phase of our work at the National Forum on Europe, I am taking this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for your contribution to the Forum's deliberations. Your address and participation in our debate were stimulating and thought provoking. I very much appreciated that you dedicated time and energy to the important work underway at the Forum.

On Thursday last, I delivered an end of term report to members of the Forum which I am enclosing with this letter. I hope that my remarks will give you a sense of the progress we have made during this phase and also enlighten you as to the tenor of the debate. I am very heartened that we are well on our way to dealing with the task we undertook here last October, to throw light on the complex of issues around what is being talked of as the "Future of Europe" and to feed in to the debate in the Convention on the Future of Europe. In the last six months we have certainly asked many questions, provided some answers and teased out some of the relevant and not so relevant policy issues. I am now beginning the process of drafting a full report on the second phase of our work which I hope to hand over to the incoming Government before the summit of EU leaders at Seville.

I look forward to keeping you up to date with the work of the Forum once we resume our public sessions after the general election. The future role of the Forum is of course a matter for the next Government. Forum members are of the view that it would be desirable to continue the work of the Forum both from the point of view of contributing to the debate underway in the Convention, and in providing a neutral venue for the continuing debate at national level on European issues.

I once again thank you for your most valuable contribution to our work.

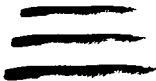
Yours sincerely,

Senator Maurice Hayes
Chairman National Forum on Europe

CHAIRMAN: Senator Maurice Hayes SECRETARY GENERAL: Walter Kirwan
Secretariat, State Apartments, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2

CATHAOIRLEACH: An Seanadóir Muiris Ó Haodha ARD-RÚNAÍ: Uaitear Ó Ciaruáin
An Rúnaireacht, Seomraí an Stáit, Caisleán Bhaile Átha Cliath, Baile Átha Cliath 2

NATIONAL FORUM ON EUROPE



FÓRAM NAISIÚNTA UM AN EORAIP

National Forum on Europe

Plenary Session, 21 March, 2002

Concluding Remarks of the Chairman

Senator Maurice Hayes

CHAIRMAN: Senator Maurice Hayes SECRETARY GENERAL: Walter Kirwan
Secretariat, State Apartments, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2

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1. Today's meeting of the Forum brings to a close the second phase of our work which, in my view, has been notable for the high level of the contributions and the debate. It was also a source of great satisfaction to me that we had a fruitful exchange of presentations with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs, focused on my first report and the excellent report by Mr. John Bruton.
2. I thought that it would again be helpful if I made some closing remarks, reviewing work to date. This summary and conclusions are my own. I shall now begin to draft a fuller report which would be presented to the Government and party leaders after the election.
3. We have devoted time to each of the four broad clusters of issues identified in my first interim report as having emerged in the first phase of our work as meriting further debate. These were:
 - a) balances between Member States;
 - b) legitimacy, accountability and transparency;
 - c) concerns over sovereignty and sensitive policy areas; and
 - d) governance.

Some of the issues have been overtaken by the agenda of the Convention on the Future of Europe and will be discussed in more detail in that context. Enlargement and how to advance it remained a continuing theme, as, to use Commissioner Patten's phrase "the most important moral cause in the European Union today"..... "ending the geo-political fault line across our continent", and as an enabling mechanism for economic, social and cultural development. Discussion could not be, of course, and was not, confined within watertight compartments. In the overview of the thematic sessions I shall attempt to reflect this broad range of comments and analysis.

4. Among general issues on which I have noted a wide measure of common ground in the Forum are
 - the moral and political imperative to bring about the prospective enlargement to include the Central and Eastern European countries

that were sundered from the rest of Europe for 50 years and suffered great hardships under undemocratic regimes

- that close EU integration should be sustained in the economic, social and environmental areas, including such aspects as controlling globalisation, climate change and food safety, subject to an appropriate balance between economic efficiency, social cohesion and environmental sustainability
- that there is no threat to Irish national or cultural identity from the European Union or the European continent.

It was also evident at our meeting today that members of the Forum and the Pillar endorse the views expressed by the SDLP delegation that

- Northern Ireland, as well as this State, has benefited economically and socially from EU membership, which has also strongly promoted links between the two parts of this island;
- common EU membership has played a vital role in promoting closer political relations between North and South in this island and within these islands; and
- the EU has made a major impact on the resolution of the conflict in this island.

5. Across the range of issues addressed, some will clearly feature in the discussions in the Convention on the Future of Europe e.g. the role of the Commission and the institutions, others are a matter that will call for discussion with our partners e.g. commitments under the Common Foreign and Security Policy and a third category relate more specifically to the national level. In this third category, I believe are issues such as the role of the Dáil and Seanad in scrutinising EU policy and the definition of our military neutrality.

Decision-Making and Union Institutions

6. We commenced our thematic sessions on 14 February under the title, Decision-making in Europe.

7. Debate focused broadly on the triangular interaction at European level between the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament. One side of the debate saw the pooling of sovereignty in chosen areas as essential if the forces of globalisation are to be controlled.
8. From this standpoint, the focus is on how to do effective business together. It was recalled that it had been foreseen since Amsterdam that enlargement to 25 or more would bring a risk of gridlock in decision-making unless reforms were put in place, including a reweighting of votes to correct the position that the larger Member States' share of votes had fallen from 53% in 1973, when Ireland joined, to 46% now and was set to fall further in the context of the next enlargement. It was acknowledged that the Council decision-making system needs to be made less opaque for the future and that it must be clear that there is responsive political control.
9. The starting point of the alternative analysis was that the essence of democracy was about informed popular participation rather than simply "getting results". People want influence and believe they can more readily exercise it at national level. The remedy favoured by those putting this viewpoint was to roll back the scope of Union responsibilities. European co-operation was accepted but on a flexible basis, with ample scope, beyond a common core of areas and standards, for opting out or going further.
10. In opposition to these views, the following points were made:
 - too rigid a division of roles would be hard to achieve and simplistic;
 - where difficulties arise, such as oil spillages, food safety or terrorism scares, people across the Member States have strong expectations that Europe will do something;
 - in many areas, it is possible to exercise greater influence from within the EU than would be possible from outside.
11. The balance between bigger and smaller Member States was another constant theme. Some feared that the Nice proposals would give larger Member States undue influence and that they would dominate the agenda through the provisions of enhanced cooperation. In the same context, some

referred to behind the scenes exercise of the corporate muscle of the multi-nationals.

12. Others argued that this was not how business was done, that there were constant shifting alliances on different issues and that big state/small state line-ups have not been a feature in EU negotiations. They also referred to the fact that there would be only 6 'big' states in a Union of 27. On enhanced co-operation, they noted that within the Union all Member States are free to participate on an equal basis. Outside the Union framework, it was noted that states could always go ahead on any common project of choice and thus that the Nice articles in fact provide safeguards.
13. Despite a wide spread of views on the issues around decision-making, there was common ground on the need, at all levels, to re-connect debate on the issues arising in the European framework with the ordinary people of Europe.
14. In regard to the role, composition and method of appointment of the European Commission, debate at a number of sessions revealed a wide area of common ground, but with some differences of emphasis in regard to the Nice Treaty provision on the future composition.
15. There was little or no dissent from the view that a strong Commission is important both in order to advance wider European interests and, from a specifically Irish standpoint, as a protector of the interests of smaller States in the Union, who depend on the objective and fair application of rules in such areas as state aids and competition policy.
16. A number of speakers, presenters and members focussed on the composition of the Commission, arguing strongly for a Commission in which every Member State would have a nominee. Debate focused on how to strike a balance between an effective Commission and one with nominees from all Member States. Others regarded the Nice provisions under which larger Member States would surrender their right to a second Commissioner and which establish the principle of equality, as significant achievements for smaller Member States.

17. Participants shared the view that greater efforts must be made by the Commission and its representative offices in Member States to reach out directly to European citizens, in plain, easily understood language, to overcome perceptions of a lack of transparency.

The Role of National Parliaments

18. Members of the Forum, I believe, are committed to the idea that the fundamental building block of the European Union is, and will continue to be, the nation-state. Most Europeans feel the strongest sense of identity with their own national institutions. Citizens feel a stronger degree of closeness and affinity with national parliamentarians who, inevitably, are the most accessible to them. Members recognise that the European Parliament also has a vital role in bringing a wider European perspective to bear, while itself playing an important representational and democratic role, which, it was accepted, is complementary to the stronger role needed for national parliaments. It is, therefore, vitally important that national parliaments become capable of playing a more active role in the scrutiny of policy and proposals emanating from the Commission, and in calling Ministers to account in respect of their participation in the Council of Ministers. Frequent meetings with Commissioners would also be desirable.
19. The general sense of debate in the Forum was that significant upgrading was required for the Dáil and Seanad fully to assume an effective and systematic role of scrutiny. We heard from the chairs of the European Affairs Committees of the Danish Parliament and of the House of Lords in the U.K. Parliament, each of which have well developed scrutiny processes. They both laid emphasis on the importance of sustaining and enhancing the role of national parliaments in EU affairs.
20. Minister Séamus Brennan presented proposals recently put forward by the Government and broadly agreed by the parties in Leinster House. The proposals are aimed at ensuring that the Dáil and Seanad play a more effective role in making the Executive accountable for its conduct of EU business and in informing the public of developments. He characterised the new arrangements as having "the potential to place us at the top of the European league table".

21. I believe it is fair to say that all members of the Forum welcomed what is regarded as a long overdue effort to make the process clearer, more accessible and, above all, more accountable. They spoke of the new proposals as a significant step towards assuaging some of the concerns they had earlier expressed about bringing Europe closer to the people through the Dáil and Seanad. However, it is also fair to say that some of our members questioned the wisdom of that aspect of arrangements whereby the relevant sectoral committees, and not a single European Affairs Committee, will assume the responsibility for scrutiny of proposals falling into their sectors, although others saw sense in this. While recognising it is a matter for the Oireachtas to decide, some argued in favour of a single structure in order to ensure both co-ordination and a strong European focus. Others called for a greater oversight role for the Seanad. In the interest of ensuring that the new procedures are genuinely as efficient and effective as the Forum would hope, a number of members, as well as visiting presenters from the Joint Oireachtas Committee, underlined the need for a serious investment of resources in the process to ensure that Ireland can match the high standards described by the Danish and UK speakers.
22. Overall, however, the members appeared generally to welcome the move towards better scrutiny and saw it as an important step on the way to meeting the concerns expressed in the national Forum. The Forum will also monitor with great interest deliberations on this matter at the Convention where a number of specific questions set out in the Laeken declaration will, inter alia, be addressed.
23. The issue of an enhanced role and opportunity for input of organised civil society came up, in particular, with respect to the stage when EU policy is being formulated and developed. This was raised at a number of our sessions, most often by organisations represented in the Special Observer Pillar, some of whom covered this issue in submissions made to the Forum.

The Social Model for a Changing Europe

24. Speakers at our Galway session and from I.C.T.U. brought out strongly the positive benefits of EU social policy in Ireland after accession. Membership

had transformed the world of work particularly in relation to the participation of working women and laid down a basic framework of rights and minimum standards of social protection which were now taken for granted.

25. The Convention was seen as an opportunity further to embed the social agenda and to move towards a more developed social model based on shared values of solidarity, fairness, equality, respect for diversity and social cohesion, which were not seen as inimical to economic prosperity. Rather, without social cohesion, the economic system could not sustain itself. In this context, there was a welcome for the emergence of the human rights approach and for the switch from passive to more active social protection measures within the EU approach to social policy in recent years. Some speakers called for the development of a significant role and better status for the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Cultural and National Identity in an Enlarging Europe

26. Issues bearing on national and cultural identity and relating to the place of culture in European Union activity were discussed in a number of sessions and significant submissions, including one in Galway. There was a clear view that culture should be given greater priority on the EU agenda, given its role and potential as a unifying force.
27. Irish culture was seen as diverse, multi-layered and now dynamic self-confident and open to influences and ideas. It was noted indeed, that it had historically been deeply connected to pan-European movements in thought and artistic inspiration. Cultural links between Ireland and Europe were seen as close and two-way. A stronger E.U. role would underpin this positive interaction, but centres of decision under E.U. schemes for supporting culture should be decentralised, not centred in Brussels.

Sovereignty and Sensitive Policy Areas

28. Before we even began our discussions on what we have come to call "concerns over sovereignty and sensitive policy areas" - it was clear that security and defence policy was the area which most concerned Forum

participants and the wider public. In our first report we asked a straightforward question. How we can accommodate Ireland's policy of military neutrality in relation to the union's security and defence policy? I make no claims on behalf of the Forum in suggesting that we have fully answered that question. But I believe that we have been successful in identifying some, if not all, of the genuine reservations which people have, and continue to hold, around the future role for a militarily neutral Ireland in an expanding Europe.

29. We were struck throughout the debate by the pride in Ireland's record of peacekeeping through the United Nations, and by the real humanitarian concern to prevent genocidal conflicts and help bind up the wounds. As ICTU put it, "there has been so much loss of life on the Continent over the last century that the goals of maintaining a peaceful Europe must surely transcend all of us".
30. The problem for many Irish people appears to be how to ensure that these laudable peacekeeping objectives are preserved in ways which can be harmonised
 - with our traditional policies of neutrality;
 - with our traditional role in preventing and helping resolve conflict and instability, in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter;
 - and do not lead to military activities outside the control of Dáil Éireann.
31. All parties spoke in favour of Ireland's traditional commitment to collective security continuing to be pursued through the UN, which has the primary role to play in the maintenance of international peace and security. It was noted that the UN is increasingly looking to regional organisations such as the EU, to undertake peace support operations on its behalf and that the depth and intensity of the EU's relations with the UN can be expected to grow. I believe it is widely accepted that the capabilities being developed by the EU could contribute substantially to the strengthening of the UN's ability to undertake crisis management.

32. I believe that most of our speakers and participants accept and support Ireland's continued role as a peacekeeper, under UN approved operations. Some speakers questioned whether our commitments under Amsterdam (the Petersberg tasks) and Nice are moving us away from our "foreign policy tradition." Professor John Maguire asserted that "We are in danger of abandoning a duty we owe to other people....., namely the retention of clear eyed democratic scrutiny over the use of force within a wider panoply of conflict resolution" Others feared that the introduction of the Rapid Reaction Force might lead to a " microcosm of a European Army".
33. One thing is clear: conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and peacemaking do involve military as well as non-military means. That is the nub of the issue. How can we put an Irish imprint or moral purpose on the range of diplomatic efforts and conflict prevention mechanisms envisaged under ESDP? Commissioner Chris Patten addressed that issue and concluded that as a small militarily neutral country Ireland must continue to maintain what he described as " a very rigorous notion of the ethical basis for foreign policy." As Chairman however, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that some speakers in our debate questioned whether the use of the moral authority of the EU in entering into conflict situations on a political or military basis could not be used as a cover for other less altruistic strategic objectives.
34. Mr Brian Cowen addressed these sensitive issues on a number of occasions insisting that the development of military capabilities does not imply the creation of a European army and that an important distinction needs to be drawn between, on the one hand, Ireland's participation as an EU member, in the process of developing policy at EU level and on the other, participation in a particular operation.
35. Any decision, he said, to participate in an EU-led operation will be a sovereign decision on a case by case basis. In accordance with Irish constitutional and legislative arrangements a specific Government decision is thus required, as is the approval of Dáil Éireann. In accordance with the Defence Acts, Ireland's Defence Forces will only participate in UN authorised peace support operations. In spite of this, some, including Professor Maguire expressed doubts.

36. My sense of the debate is that a two-pronged approach is being called for; one at European level and one more at the level of national debate.
37. On one occasion during our deliberations, the Taoiseach asked "Neutral on what? Neutral to what?" Deputy John Gormley also addressed the question. I believe that there is support for Deputy Gormley's view that we need to move away from defining our neutrality in terms of a negative.
38. At national level, there appears to be support for a public and sustained debate on the nature and definition of Ireland's military neutrality and international role in the prevention of conflict and instability, including possible commitments in the context of the European Union's security and defence policies. Also on how the two are best accommodated, perhaps in the context of a debate on the Defence Acts.
39. Second, but more urgently, members of the Forum underlined the importance of assurances from the Government that;
- nothing we commit to under Nice, or indeed earlier treaties, requires, suggests, or implies a departure from Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality or the values underlying it;
 - that there is no plan to enter any alliance for mutual defence, that it is not a party to any plans to develop a European army, it does not intend becoming so, and would not move from these positions without the express approval of the Irish people;
 - no plan to change the basis on which Ireland participates in peacekeeping and conflict prevention operations; (i.e. through UN, Government and Dáil approval processes).
40. At European level, a confirmation by our partners that Ireland's neutral status would be fully respected in relation to any initiatives in the security domain would also be a gesture of reassurance. This could be achieved through a plainly worded statement of the Government's perception of Ireland's commitments under the treaties which could assuage these fundamental areas of concern and which EU partners could be invited to

confirm in some broadly acceptable format, which some members of the Forum consider should have sufficient legal effect.

The Forum and the Convention

41. Our meeting today coincides with the first normal working session of the Convention. I believe that in the context of its work, there is a critical and urgent need to sustain the debate here in Ireland and to keep consulting and listening to the peoples of Europe. This will be done in part through developing dialogue with the Irish representatives to the Convention.

The Future of the Forum

42. The Steering Committee has discussed the future role of the Forum within this broader European context but also, of course, taking account of the national context. It will, be a matter for the next Government to take a view on whether the Forum should continue and along what lines. Forum members are of the view that it would be desirable to continue the work of the Forum both from the point of view of contributing to the debate underway in the Convention on the Future of Europe, and, in providing a neutral venue for the continuing debate at national level on European issues. Forum members would favour undertaking further rounds of mini-fora as part of the ongoing calendar.

Tributes

43. I want to pay a tribute to the membership of the Forum and to MEPs for the commitment to our work, shown by levels of attendance in this pre-electoral period and their readiness to travel to regional meetings. The debate benefited from frequent contributions by Ministers, Ministers of State and other experienced parliamentarians but it was also good to see the participation of councillors and other representatives of a new, younger generation of political representatives. Also worthy of commendation has been the involvement of the Special Observer Pillar. Its members have not been mere observers. As envisaged in the design of the Forum, they may and do engage actively in all our plenary sessions and at many meetings, over 20 Pillar members have attended. I have met them regularly to brief

them on developments and plans and to solicit their views on our ongoing work, where they have also helped us in identifying and obtaining speakers. I have also been delighted to see a large and frequent attendance at our meetings by members of the Diplomat corps. This was particularly welcome when they accompanied us on our journey through the mini-fora.

44. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to express appreciation to all the support staff and others who have helped us. Thanks are due to a very hard-working Secretariat team, who, brought together in haste from a number of sources, have forged a remarkable spirit of cohesion and commitment and have given great service to this Forum and tremendous support to me.
45. San Fhóram seo, deineadh cuid nach beag den díospóireacht as Gaeilge. Mo bhuíochas dár dteangaire seasta, Marie Ní Chonchubhair, a chinntigh gur thuigeamar go léir a chéile and do Cholm Ó Tórna agus Foras na Gaeilge a chuir na cluasáin ar fáil gan teip gach seachtain.
46. Níl le déanamh agam anois ach rath agus séan a ghuí oraibh go léir.

Appendix 1

Overview of Forum Activity in Second Phase

Number and distribution of meetings

1. The 10 further meetings over the last two months bring the total of plenary sessions to 18. A further mini-forum held in An Cheathrú Rua, since completion of my first report, brought the total of mini-fora to 9 and of public meetings under the aegis of the Forum to 27, one short of the number of regional and national fora held in France, a much larger and more populous Member State. Taking account of the full meetings in Cork and Galway, 11 of our 27 meetings took place outside central Dublin. The regional mini-fora were well attended, with attendances ranging from 100 to 400, averaging over 200 and with widespread and vigorous engagement by those members of the public present.

International Dimension

2. Speakers since the New Year have included high level visitors from partner and candidate countries, including Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Britain and Poland, together with two members of the European Commission, its Secretary General, the President of European Parliament, the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and a top level official from the I.L.O. With pre-Christmas participation from France, Slovenia, Malta, the Czech Republic, as well as Denmark and the U.K., international experience and perspectives have been brought to our debate, to match the excellent inputs from distinguished speakers based in Ireland.

Outline of programme

3. The programme for the second phase commenced on 1 February, 2002 with a session entitled "Ireland and an enlarging Europe after Laeken: what are the choices?", with the following speakers: Mr. Brian Cowen, T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. John Gormley, T.D., and Ms. Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, Belgian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

4. The programme continued on 11 February, with a full day meeting in Dublin City Hall, devoted to presentations of submissions made to the Forum by the Institute of European Affairs, the National Youth Council, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, Comhlámh, Irish CND and individual submissions by Mr. D. S. Ó Buachalla and Captain William Butler. An intervention was also made by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr. Michael Mulcahy.
5. There then followed a series of 5 thematic sessions, as follows:
 - (1) 14 February, Dublin Castle
‘Decision-making in Europe – how to get effective decisions and good policies, while ensuring democratic legitimacy and support and a fair role for every Member State?’, with, as speakers, Mr. Pat Cox, MEP, President of the European Parliament and Professor Drude Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science, University of Stockholm, founder member of Danish ‘June Movement’;
 - (2) 21 February, Dublin Castle
‘What approaches to EU foreign and security policy will (1) do most good in the world (2) reflect and promote Ireland’s interests and values?’ with, as speakers, Mr. Chris Patten, member of the European Commission responsible for external relations and Professor John Maguire, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University College, Cork;
 - (3) 28 February, Galway,
Morning session: ‘What social model for a changing Europe: Within the model to be chosen, what is the appropriate balance between the EU, the Member States, the regions and civil society?’, with, as speakers, Ms. Patricia O’Donovan, Director of the Infocus Programme on Strengthening Social Dialogue of the International Labour Organisation, Ms. Michaela Moser, European Anti-Poverty Network, Austria and Professor Gerard Quinn, Dean of the Faculty of Law, National University of Ireland, Galway;
Afternoon session: ‘Cultural and national identity in an enlarging Europe’, with, as speakers, Mr. Colm Ó Briain, former Special Adviser to the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, former

Director, The Arts Council, founder member, the Project Arts Centre; Mr. Anthony Cronin, writer, member of Aosdána, former Cultural Adviser to the Taoiseach, Ms. Lelia Doolan, former member of the board of Directors of Bord Scannán na hÉireann, film and television producers, lecturer in Galway/Mayo Institute of Technology;

- (4) 7 March, Dublin Castle, 'the European Commission – its future role, composition and method of appointment', with, as speakers, Mr. David O'Sullivan, Secretary General, the European Commission and Professor Joe Lee, Head of the Department of History, University College, Cork; and
- (5) 14 March, Dublin Castle, 'Ireland in an enlarging Europe – the role of national parliaments and of civil society', with, as speakers, Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen, President of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament, Lord Brabazon of Tara, Chairman of the Select Committee on European Union of the British House of Lords and Mr. Séamus Brennan, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach and Government Chief Whip, responsible for, inter alia, parliamentary reform.

For each of these, the Forum Secretariat prepared and circulated in advance a comprehensive background paper.

6. The spring programme closed with a session in Dublin Castle on 21 March, 2002, on 'Ireland, Enlargement and Nice: What Path to Take', with, as speakers, Mr. David Byrne, member of the European Commission responsible for health and consumer protection and Mr. Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Foreign Minister of Poland.
7. In addition, presentations based on submissions made to the Forum or, in the case of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs, its report on the Future of Europe, were made as follows:

14 February - delegation from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

- 12 March - (1) delegation from Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs
(2) delegation from Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge
21 March - delegation from the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland

A mini-forum, conducted primarily in Irish, was held in An Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe on 1 March and the Chairman of the Forum, accompanied by members of the Steering Committee made a presentation on 11 March, 2002 to a public meeting of the Joint Oireachtas on European Affairs.

8. The high quality of speakers helped to build up media coverage of the Forum's work, from a slow start, to more satisfactory levels, although we are by no means complacent and much more progress needs to be made. The mini-fora were effective in generating substantial coverage in local and regional media. Recent editions of a weekly syndicated radio programme on our work have been taken by up to 7 stations, while a commissioned T.V. programme goes out weekly on the NTL cable television stations in the greater Dublin area. The number of hits on the Forum's website – which has been singled out for praise by specialist organs – has progressively increased to 1000 a week, a level that demonstrates considerable public interest in its work. Almost 80 submissions have been received from organisations and individuals, of which 50 are on our web-site. Two full day sessions were devoted to hearing public presentations of 15 such submissions, including from the National Women's Council; National Youth Council; the European Commission; the Institute of European Affairs; Irish CND; Comhlámh; and ATTAC. More recently, as indicated, additional part-sessions were organised to hear strong presentations from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge and the SDLP. Mention should also be made of excellent submissions from Forfás on the effects of enlargement on Ireland; and by the Review Group for the Mid-Term Review of the Common Fisheries Policy on that review.
9. The Chairman's report on the first phase of our work has been published. It was well received by the members of the Forum and of the Pillar as an

accurate and fair reflection of discussions up to end of January. Our impressions are that it was also well received by the Government, the parties and wider society, including the members of the Diplomatic Corps, many of whom, it is acknowledged with appreciation, have followed our work closely.

10. Taking the first and second phases together, we have covered a very wide range of subjects, ranging from agriculture to governance, from cultural identity to foreign and security policy. Concerned interest groups brought to our attention a number of less obvious but equally valid issues, including the difficulties faced by fishermen, problems flowing from the implementation of the Habitats Directive and the status of the Irish language, as linguistic regimes evolve in an enlarging Union.