

## Statement by Tony Blair on the Laeken Declaration (London, 17 December 2001)

**Caption:** On 17 December 2001, Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, delivers an address to the House of Commons in which he outlines the outcome of the Laeken European Council and welcomes the Declaration on the Future of the European Union.

**Source:** Laeken - Prime Minister's statement to Parliament. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, [29.04.2005]. Disponible sur <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1676.asp>.

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## Laeken-Prime Minister's statement to Parliament (17 December 2001)

[...]

Mr Speaker, the European Council's other main purpose was to prepare for discussion on the future of Europe. It now looks increasingly likely as if ten new countries will join the European Union in 2004. We welcome that. Their accession will contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in Europe - ours as well as theirs. But it is obvious that the European Union cannot, with 25 and more members, work in the same way, with precisely the same constitution, as it has with 15. Decision-making will need to be streamlined. EU laws will need increasingly to take the form of framework legislation, with the details of implementation left to the member states. It is already the task of the European Council to give strategic direction to the European Union as a whole. But carrying that strategic direction into practice will mean looking again at the size and role of the Commission, reviewing the workings of the existing Presidency of the Union, which presently changes hands every six months, and managing the business of the various specialist Councils in a more coherent way. That was why, at Nice, a year ago, when we opened the way for enlargement, we also agreed that there should be another Intergovernmental Conference in 2004 and why now we are going to set up a Convention to prepare for that Conference by detailed examination of all these issues.

The basic agenda for that Conference was agreed at Nice. The sort of questions which will need to be asked are set out in the Declaration of Heads of Government issued at Laeken at the weekend.

That Declaration, which I welcome, acknowledges the contribution which the European Union has made to peace, stability and prosperity in all our countries, but also the extent to which it has to deliver results to its citizens on jobs, the single market, the fight against crime, a safe environment. The British view, widely shared, is that while it is right to co-operate ever more closely with our partners, democratic accountability is fundamentally and ultimately rooted in the Member State. As the Declaration says, what Europe's citizens expect is "more results, better responses to practical issues and not a European superstate or European institutions inveigling their way into every nook and cranny of life".

The Laeken Declaration, and the Convention, give us the opportunity to take a serious look at the division of competences between the Union and the Member States. For the first time in the Union's history we shall be looking at the prospect of restoring some tasks to the Member States. We now also have the chance to open up the European institutions to greater public scrutiny. And the role which I want to see our Parliament playing in policing that process is now explicitly recognised.

The Convention which we have now established will be chaired by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing who, when President of France, played an instrumental role in bringing the European Council into being. It will work for a year. Each national parliament will have two representatives as members of the Convention. The regions will be represented as observers and there will be ample opportunity for views from all sectors of public opinion to be fed into the proceedings. Consultations will, of course, be held in the usual way on who our Parliamentary representatives will be. The Convention will present options to Heads of Government who will determine whether those options should lead to changes in the Treaty. Those changes would be made by unanimous agreement of governments.

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