

Press Release: Re-launch of the European Constitutional Group; Speech by Count Lambsdorff

Speaking in Berlin on the occasion of the re-launching of the European Constitutional Group, Otto Count Lambsdorff, Chairman of the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, declared that Europe has reached a turning point. In summoning the European Convention under the leadership of former French President Giscard d'Estaing, the European Union has at least demonstrated its realisation that its institutions and regulations must be thoroughly revised and adapted to modern realities. "We need a Europe that supports simpler and more intelligible procedures. Freedom of choice for the citizens and the principle of competition must once again gain central focus" stated Lambsdorff. Nowadays, within the EU there is clearly too much centralisation, too much regulation and protectionism. "What we need are institutions which are representative of the cultural and social diversity of Europe and which are in touch with the true wishes and interests of the citizens." According to Lambsdorff, it is not sufficient to continually look to a strengthening of the European Parliament as a cure-all. The parliament can certainly be strengthened, but suggestions to give the parliament its own powers of taxation are counterproductive. "A European parliament which has the power to raise taxes is an engine for centralisation and remoteness from the citizens."

Clear constitutional rules, which are transparent and which strengthen democracy at the lower levels, are extremely important. We should insist that the unanimity clause in the Council be transformed in a more democratic way instead of being eroded step by step. "Would not a transfer of veto powers from the executive branch in the Council of Ministers to the national parliaments strengthen both, democracy and subsidiarity?", asked Lambsdorff in this context. Competencies must be clearly distributed between the levels of government and kept separate from each other. "The citizen must recognize more clearly than heretofore why a certain task is accomplished at the EU level or not, as the case may be."

With his speech, Lambsdorff launched the re-convening of the "European Constitutional Group". This is a gathering of prominent liberal economists and legal experts from all over Europe, who plan to accompany the work of the European Convention with critical commentary and suggestions. As long ago as 1993 this group put forth a draft proposal for a European constitution.

Lambsdorff emphasized the necessity of such a critical accompaniment of the discussions of the Convention through an independent group of experts, as planned by the European Constitutional Group. Most of the members of the Convention itself come from the "establishment" of the European Union; such members are reluctant to urge the issues of decentralisation and competitive federalism. "This is why ventures such as that of the European Constitutional Group are so important," summarized Lambsdorff. "They have to remind the Convention during the whole proceedings about the direction that should be taken."

Members:

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