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To the President of the Irish Presidency of the European Union

Re: March European Council
Citizens' Europe, Innovation and European Competitiveness: the New Stage

Dear Sir,

Citizens increasingly regard the European Union as a machine that is far away from their own concerns. A few months away from the European elections of 2004, EU citizens are bewildered and extremely critical towards European leaders. The rejection of Europe, its values and its institutions by all populist movements may well increase. The new rise in regional and other idiosyncrasies, nationalism and xenophobia is a threat for Europe. **TO REVERSE THIS CENTRIFUGAL TREND, STRONG, MOBILIZING ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN. RIGHT NOW!**

- We strongly wish for the European Council, on the eve of the EU elections, to make a stand in line with the aspirations of the peoples of Europe by issuing an announcement in March 2004 about the launch of "A New Stage for the Citizens' Europe".
- We call on the European Council, at its March 2004 meeting, to set a task to the Union: the project of establishing a "European Contract for a Well-Being Society", accompanied by a European Participatory Budget for 2007-2013.
- We propose the setting-up of a Convention III as an instrument to draw up this Contract between Europeans, public authorities, social partners and civil society. The new Convention would start work in September 2005. It would be an important step in the implementation of the EU objectives defined by the draft Constitution "*The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples*" (Art I-3, §1).
- We demand the establishment of a task force on the theme of the "European Participatory Budget for 2007-2013", which would bring together representatives from the European Commission, the EU Member States, parliaments and civil society in order to prepare proposals in terms of participatory democracy and the European budget, particularly with a view to the convening of a Convention III.

As studies have shown, European growth and competitiveness will be increasingly dependent on new policies geared to innovation and on (i) major technological waves, (ii) changes in production and consumption patterns for a well-being society at a world level, (iii) the establishment of new partnerships and synergies between public authorities, the private sector and civil society.

This project will convey a strong message: "*The Union is a source of progress which meets your aspirations for a well-being society and intends to implement a European participatory democracy*". A well-being society is a society in which everyone's dignity is recognized and safeguarded, their fundamental needs are fulfilled and their desire for quality life and their right to a healthy environment are met. The process will meet six major challenges:

1. To those who fear the establishment of a two-speed Europe, Convention III will bring the message that "Together we can do more for each of you and for a well-being society".
2. To those who are afraid of the growing gap between the States for which EU enlargement amounts to social *dumping* and the peoples of Europe yearning for greater well-being, it can be said that the theme of the European Contract for "a well-being society" puts a highly competitive social market economy at the core of discussions, which is one of the objectives of the draft Constitution.
3. To those who consider that neither the Charter of Fundamental Rights nor the draft Constitution sufficiently meet the expectations of a Europe in which the values of equality, solidarity and justice have been added to those of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights, it can be said that the European Contract and its connection with the 2007-2013 budget bring the assurance of a new dynamic.
4. To those who are scared that Europe has to face several interconnected challenges – making a success of its enlargement, adapting to the social challenges linked to its demographic development, managing to shift to a post-modern society and building an "ethical globalization" – it can be said that Convention III offers an opportunity to develop new "synergies" between public authorities, the private sector, social economy and NGOs.
5. We are convinced that the launch of a "European participatory budget" would constitute an important source of innovation with a view to meeting the Lisbon objectives, as well as a source of greater efficiency in the management of cooperation programmes with third countries.
6. What's more, Convention III, which would be an exercise in participatory democracy on the theme of a well-being society and the European participatory budget, would act as powerful potential leverage to redefine shared values and recreate social capital and solidarity. Finally, it would make citizens aware of the potentialities and constraints of a Community budget.

The enclosed note is launching a discussion process within European civil society. We are grateful to the organizers of the Forum's States-General which will be held in Rome on..... for putting the European Contract and the European Participatory Budget on the agenda. Other meetings will take place later on in order to prepare a Convention III, which is proposed to be launched in September 2005.

We remain at your disposal to come and present our proposal in person. In the event of the Irish Presidency agreeing to put this issue on the agenda of the March European Council, we are inviting you to take the floor at the Rome meeting of 23 April 2004, which will be held in a highly a highly symbolical place, the Campidoglio, where the Rome Treaty was signed in March 1957 and where the Forum presented its European Citizens' Charter in March 1997. For us, the members of the Forum, "the new stage" represented by the European Contract and the European participatory budget could not find a place more steeped in history for their launch.

Yours faithfully,