



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD  
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE  
European Affairs Working Group

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The main task of the working group since last it reported has been to monitor the work of the European Convention which from February 2002 to July 2003 worked on a draft Constitutional Treaty for the European Union under the presidency of Valery Giscard d'Estaing.

The final draft was presented to the Italian presidency in July 2003, but agreement was not reached and the issue is now in the hands of the Irish presidency. The Taoiseach has promised that Ireland will do all it can to promote agreement, but many difficulties remain.

The working group has been enabled to follow matters relating to the draft constitution through the National Forum on Europe, where the chairman, Dr Kenneth Milne, is a member of the Special Observer Pillar, Dr Adrian Empey being the alternate member.

A large number of issues of concern to the churches are covered by the draft constitution, not least being the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union. The draft treaty also, for the first time, guarantees the churches' right of consultation by the EU institutions. The inclusion of references to God and to Christianity in the Preamble to the treaty is being sought by some member states and churches. This matter was among those discussed when we met with Monsignor Noel Treanor, of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union. It also received consideration at a meeting in Brussels last autumn under the auspices of the Conference of European Churches. We have canvassed the views of other Anglican churches and of the Porvoo churches, and it has been agreed by the Standing Committee of the General Synod that this working group will advise it in this matter at an appropriate time.

The enlargement of the Union from 15 to 25 members takes place in 1 May, during the Irish presidency, and we have benefited by our membership of the Institute of European Affairs which has arranged a programme of meetings, at which we have been represented, addressed by political figures from the new states.