Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about Europe in Bruges, one of the jewels of European culture and history. I am particularly honoured to do so here, at the college of Europe, which has such a strong tradition of debating the major European issues.

On the basis of my experience and my responsibilities as President of the European Commission, I would like to outline what I consider the points that should be clear from the outset.

The first thing we have to do is to start from a project for Europe. What is the objective we are joining together to pursue? What do we want to do together? What measure of solidarity between us do we want to achieve? These questions and the answers we give to them should lead logically to a structure for the new institutions.
Second, we ought to be aware of just how original a creation the Union is. All our lasting achievements, from the single market to the euro, (with four successive enlargements along the way) have been brought about through a completely innovative structure based on a delicate balance between institutions.

The innovative character of the Union derives directly from the attachment of Europeans to a community of peoples and of states. This innovative character is something we must maintain.

The system is founded on the institutional triangle of Council, Parliament and Commission - though it would be more accurate to speak of a quadrilateral, so as to include the Court of Justice; the Court is the guarantee that the community is founded on the rule of law, which has been a decisive factor in the integration process. The system has proved an extraordinary success.

It is a balanced system, in which each institution plays its own specific and decisive role. Strengthen any one of the institutions and you strengthen the whole; weaken any one and you weaken the whole.

The Commission is the guardian of the Treaties, and with its right of initiative the foremost example of the originality of the system; and the Commission will defend that system.
Lastly, a reform of the European institutions cannot avoid a rethink of the role and functions of the national parliaments.

A way has to be found of associating them with the most important European decisions. The forthcoming convention will be a useful example, and an important precedent.

Nevertheless, I think that setting up a further house of the legislature at European level would be pointless and counterproductive. Our institutional system is sufficiently complex and cumbersome as it is.

More lightweight solutions will have to be found, possibly taking advantage of a separation between the Council's executive and legislative functions.

Building on the protocol annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam, it is vital that the national parliaments be informed of Community legislative proposals properly and in good time, so that they can perform their function of political guidance and control at national level.

In a Union enlarged perhaps to 25 members or more, we will have to abandon the present procedure for systematic ratification of Treaties by parliaments.
A useful move in this direction would be to divide the provisions of the Treaties into two categories, as the Commission proposed in the run-up to the last intergovernmental conference. One category would consist of the fundamental provisions, and here any amendment would continue to be subject to ratification. The second category would consist of provisions of a technical nature, and here simplified procedures might be envisaged. But no reform will have achieved the objective if it does not succeed in ensuring that the Community has a real capacity to take decisions.

Respect for the basic rule of democracy, and the fact that as I have said the Union has to have real decision-making power, require that majority voting become the general rule. In the big Europe created by enlargement, there can be no more room, except possibly in special and clearly defined circumstances, for a right of veto. Enlargement must not mean paralysis.

In the same way, we will also have to consider the question of the Union's own resources. The time has come to ask questions about our sources of revenue and the necessary discretion to decide spending. This is not a technical question: it is a political question, and must be given full attention in the debate on the future of Europe.