Mr Chairman,

It is a great honour for me to stand here in a building at the very heart of Dutch democracy.

Your political traditions have influenced the development of the European Union from its outset. But your influence on political thought in the UK goes back much further.

In the 16th century, an Englishman, Sir Thomas More, visited the Netherlands on a diplomatic mission. Inspired by his surroundings, and under the influence of a dialogue with his great friend Erasmus, he developed his concept of an ideal society in his book *Utopia*. One hundred and fifty years later, it was again to the Netherlands that British Parliamentarians turned in their struggle against the absolutist politics of King James II. The arrival of William and Mary, and of the 'Glorious Revolution', guaranteed the rights of the British Parliament and founded our constitutional monarchy as we know it.

Mr Chairman,

My aim today is to ask some fundamental questions:

- First, how can we make the EU better understood?
- Second, how can we make it more democratically accountable?
- And third, how can we make the EU more effective?

The Convention on the Future of Europe, which begins its work in a few days' time, is an opportunity for the whole of the EU, and the applicants who wish to join it, to debate these questions. It will then be for the governments of the member states to take some difficult but key decisions.

I welcome this debate. We in Britain approach it with confidence. And there could be no better time for it. We stand on the edge of a genuinely historic moment – the unification of Europe not by force of arms, but by force of argument. This round of enlargement will mean that most of the great cities and the great cultures of Europe will soon be within the EU; and those that are not in this round want to be in the next.

Enlargement is a great opportunity for Europe. It will promote jobs, wealth and security in both new and existing member states. Over a year ago, the Netherlands and the UK proposed the timetable for bringing in the new member states. The European Council adopted it. Now we must make it a reality.

But we have also to remember that enlargement is a great challenge. In its own terms, it is an ambitious undertaking for existing as well as new member states. It involves three times as many applicants as any previous enlargement. And with it will come much greater economic disparity.
Whilst the admission of ten new applicants for 2004 would add 23% to the EU's land area, and 20% to its population, it would add just 4% to its GDP.

Enlargement — and its prospect — also raise some serious questions about the way the EU runs at 15, let alone at 25 or 30. Reform is critical if the EU is to function properly. But it has to be said that the nitty-gritty of issues like co-decision versus council supremacy, Qualified-Majority Voting or the Common Agricultural Policy leaves many, if not most, of our citizens pretty cold.

So before deciding on the ‘what’, we need, first, to spell out the ‘why’ of the EU, the ‘why’ of the case for change.

Last week I visited Afghanistan. My first reaction at the utter devastation of parts of Kabul, and, worse, at the elderly faces of children acquainted too early with grief, was to think that this was another world: that ‘it couldn’t happen here’.

Then I remembered my early childhood - just after the war - the bomb sites all over London, pictures of the ruins of Rotterdam and Coventry, Cologne and Dresden, and the aftermath of the Holocaust. Then in that so-called post-war ‘peace’, there was the Berlin blockade, the Iron Curtain, and more recently there has been the carnage in the Balkans.

And I reminded myself that for centuries Europe had been defined by conflict as bloody, as senseless, as that experienced anywhere else in the world; that Europe’s latent capacity for violence in pursuit of what we want - or think we want - is terrifying.

Indeed, the great Dutch patriot and humanist, Grotius, made the same point over 400 years ago when he wrote in his Prolegomena, ‘I saw in the whole Christian world a licence of fighting at which even barbarous nations might blush. Wars were begun on trifling pretexts or none at all, and carried on without any reference of law, Divine or human’.