

Press release by the Irish Council Presidency (18 June 2004)

Caption: On 18 June 2004, at an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) that had commenced on 4 October 2003, the Heads of State or Government of the 25 Member States of the European Union reach agreement on a new Constitutional Treaty for Europe.

Source: Ireland's Presidency of the EU, Latest news: Taoiseach announces EU agreement on a new Constitutional Treaty for Europe (18 June 2004). [ON-LINE]. [Dublin]: Government of Ireland, [21.01.2005]. Available on http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/news.asp?sNavlocator=66&list_id=862.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/press_release_by_the_irish_council_presidency_18_june_2004-en-0a549613-af3f-4965-a59a-b8367544bd23.html

Publication date: 04/09/2012

Press release by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU: Taoiseach announces EU agreement on a new Constitutional Treaty for Europe (18 June 2004)

The Taoiseach and President of the European Council, Mr Bertie Ahern announced this evening that EU leaders have reached agreement on a new Constitutional Treaty for Europe at the European Council in Brussels.

Speaking at the concluding Presidency Press Conference in the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, Mr. Ahern said that the Constitutional Treaty is a "great achievement for Europe and for all Europeans."

"I am delighted to say that we have reached agreement this afternoon. We have agreed the Constitutional Treaty for Europe.

"Everyone came to Brussels this weekend with the political will necessary to achieve a consensus. We had a number of very constructive discussions during the past two days. And I want to thank all my colleagues for their positive engagement.

"We have all achieved a fundamental advance for the European Union. And the text enables everyone to say that their specific concerns were accommodated. We have listened to each other and understood each other's concerns. This is a win-win solution.

"Enabling everyone to say that their concerns have been accommodated in the round is the way the European Union has worked in the past. And, I am very happy to say that we have proven today that this is the way the Union will continue to work in the future.

"The Constitutional Treaty that we have agreed is a very significant milestone in the evolution of the European Union.

"Many of us have been involved in the nitty-gritty of the negotiation during the past few months. We have discussed at some considerable length the details of issues such as the weighting of votes, the scope of qualified majority voting and the number of Commissioners. These, of course, are all critically important issues.

"But we shouldn't forget that we have also agreed the values and objectives of the European Union. And we have done so in such a way that the ordinary person on the street can understand.

"We will now have the task of ratifying this Constitutional Treaty. And in our efforts to explain the Constitutional Treaty to our citizens we can rely on the text itself.

"A clause which says that the Union's values are respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights is a clause that can be clearly understood by everyone.

"When the Constitution says that the Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples - this too will resonate with all decent people.

"The Constitutional Treaty brings the Union's basic law into one document for the first time. It reflects the needs of a community of nations that has dramatically broadened its membership.

"This Constitutional Treaty will enable the European Union to become more transparent and more democratic. It sets out the powers of the member states and of the Union in a clear way. It will enable the Union to do its work in a more efficient and effective manner. It will give us a framework in which we can grow and prosper into the future.

"Many, many people have been involved in ensuring that our ship has been safely docked today. I would like to thank all who have been involved in this process. This is a great achievement for Europe and for all

Europeans."

Speaking also at the concluding Press Conference, outgoing President of the European Commission, Mr Romano Prodi said, "Today we have approved a new Constitution. It is a moment of great political prominence.

"A Constitution is the essence of any shared political unity. Today, we've laid stable foundations for the very reason we are here. We respect our cultural differences, our national specificities. By doing this we confirm the values we hold together and the objectives we hold together.

"I would like to express my congratulations to Bertie and the Irish Presidency. They've succeeded in achieving agreement which has been difficult. We've worked together to achieve something that is transparent and runs deep. We have the instrument so that we can take the Union forward. Now the job is to get the mechanism to work effectively. That is why we wanted to adopt this Constitution. We have worked for it tenaciously. We've done it for Europe and for its' citizens.

"Like all great changes, this may spark off fear of the new. So it beholds us to explain this to our citizens and explain what this Constitution is about and what it will mean for Europe. We share, in our institutions, aspects of national sovereignty. This is the only way to take the continent forward together in a globalised world. European integration is the best guarantee of the survival of our identities and our social models, because we have a great challenge to face in a globalised world," Mr Prodi concluded.

Mr Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, added, "I think this is a very significant and positive step forward for the European Union...I think it is the first proof, in terms of substance and strategy, that the new European Union of 25 can deliver and will deliver together to the peoples of Europe. The IGC has been a great success under the Irish Presidency and has built upon the spirit and the substance of the Convention which preceded it. I think that 90% or more of the work of the Convention remains unchanged and then the politically sensitive elements which we are familiar with have been carried through the Intergovernmental Conference.

"I want to say, on behalf of the European Parliament and my colleagues in the Parliament who have worked on the Convention and been full participants in the IGC, that we have been proud to be a partner in its success. I think, since we met here in December last, the mood changed radically with regard to the Constitutional Treaty and its prospects. I believe this represents a victory for the quiet, patient, and inclusive diplomacy and politics of the Irish Presidency.

"I would like, for the Parliament, to congratulate the Taoiseach, to congratulate the Foreign Minister, Brian Cowen, the Minister for European Affairs, Dick Roche and all of their diplomats and collaborators in reaching tonight's successful conclusion. Here tonight, just a few moments ago there was a standing ovation for the Taoiseach and his team - something which I think was richly deserved and a mark of esteem and respect for a job well done.

We have now adopted the Constitutional Treaty politically. The time starts now to explain it to the public, to sell it and to ratify it," Mr Cox stated.

In conclusion the Taoiseach expressed his gratitude to Mr. Valarie Giscard d'Estaing and the work of the European Convention.