

Address given by Bertie Ahern at the launch of the information campaign on the European Constitution (28 October 2004)

Caption: On 28 October 2004, at the launch of the Irish Government's information campaign on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Prime Minister Bertie Ahern emphasises the importance of the Constitutional Treaty for Ireland's future role in the European Union.

Source: Speech by the Taoiseach Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D. at the Launch of Government Information Material on the European Constitution. [ON-LINE]. [Dublin]: Department of the Taoiseach, [20.06.2005]. Disponible sur <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=399&docID=1878>.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_bertie_ahern_at_the_launch_of_the_information_campaign_on_the_european_constitution_28_october_2004-en-6c74a635-e31d-4b6b-be92-7639c42ae5b9.html

Publication date: 05/09/2012

Speech by the Taoiseach Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D. at the Launch of Government Information Material on the European Constitution (28 October 2004)

Tomorrow in Rome, together with the other Heads of State or Government of the EU, I will sign the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

The European Constitution will be signed in the same room in which, fifty years ago, six European countries signed the original Treaty of Rome.

The European Constitution is not just another Treaty in the succession of Treaties that have underpinned the evolution of the European Union. It brings to an end an intensive period of constitutional reform in the Union.

It replaces all of the previous Treaties. It establishes the basic legal text of the European Union for the foreseeable future.

Since the original Treaty of Rome, the political situation in Europe has fundamentally changed.

The fall of the Berlin wall set in train a process of democratisation that ended the post war division and reunited Europe. The enlarged EU is developing new relationships with its neighbours to the East and in the Mediterranean.

Increasingly the Union is playing a more active role in helping to resolve international crises through conflict resolution and effective multilateralism.

The economic situation has also changed. The EU is a global trade power. We have an integrated internal market of 470 million people facing the challenges of globalisation, particularly the rapidly growing highly competitive economies of Asia. The Europe of twenty-five member States has to deliver growth employment and social cohesion for its people.

This new enlarged European Union simply cannot operate effectively on the basis of fundamental Treaty provisions that were agreed half a century ago.

If the Union is to meet the ambitions of its citizens for peace, prosperity and security, it has to have a new basic legal text.

The Union has to be crystal clear about the fundamental principles governing its organisation and its actions. The European Constitution clarifies the division of powers between the Union and the member States. The Union only has powers that the member States explicitly give to it. Otherwise powers remain with the member States and the Union does not have the authority to act.

The Union has to set out the principles that guide its actions internationally. The European Constitution says that the Union stands for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for the principles of the UN Charter.

The Union has to identify the fundamental rights that its institutions and the member States must reflect when they are implementing EU law. The Charter of Fundamental Rights sets these rights out clearly.

The Union has to have democratic and transparent institutions that take decisions effectively and accountably. The European Constitution provides that the Council will meet in public when it legislates. It reforms the voting system in the Council of Ministers to make decision-making more efficient and more equitable.

The Constitution also introduces innovations such as a President of the European Council and a Union Foreign Minister to bring coherence to policy making and to help promote the Unions interests and

objectives externally.

The European Constitution does not fundamentally alter the relationship between the member States and the Union. Neither does it result in the transfer of significant new powers to the EU.

I want to stress that the European Constitution does not supersede or in any way detract from the provisions of Bunreacht na hEireann. Our national constitution remains the basic legal document of the State. The European Constitution is the basic legal text of the European Union.

member States have to ratify the European Constitution, in accordance with their domestic procedures, before 1 November 2006. There will, therefore, be a referendum in Ireland on an amendment to the Irish Constitution that will allow us to ratify the European Constitution.

It is essential that, before this vote takes place, there is a national dialogue on the issues based on clear and accurate information.

To foster this informed debate, the Government is today publishing two documents that will be circulated as widely as possible.

The first is a short pamphlet that sets out, in plain language, what the European Constitution is and why it is important. The second is an explanatory guide to the Constitution that goes into more detail on its provisions.

I urge people to read these documents. The referendum on the European Constitution is about the future. It is about the Europe in which our children will live. It is about the values that Europe stands for. It is about preserving peace, stability and prosperity in a continent facing major economic and political challenges in a globalising and turbulent world.

Next year the Government will publish a White Paper on the European Constitution.

This will further add to people's information and the Constitution's implications for Ireland's future role in Europe.

In the coming months, the independent Forum on Europe will, I know, also be doing its utmost to inform people about the European Constitution and to help foster the national debate on the issues at stake.

I am proud that agreement on the European Constitution was reached during the Irish Presidency of the EU. On 1 May we held a Day of Welcomes in Dublin to celebrate the accession of ten new member States. Six weeks later, I presided over the final negotiations that resulted in agreement on the Constitution.

Enlargement and the new Constitution provide the cornerstones of the new post war Europe. The fact that both came to fruition during our EU Presidency shows that Ireland remains at the heart of Europe. After over 30 years of membership, we continue to benefit from our strong and active engagement with the EU and to exert real influence over its decision-making.

We are a deeply experienced and highly respected member of the Union. Our partners know our concerns and, in turn, we have made our own national contribution to European integration.

The Government is determined that Ireland will remain a reliable partner in Europe, committed to the achievement of the objectives set out in the European Constitution.

Our national interests will be best served through the ratification and implementation of the Constitution. It is a good deal for Europe and a good deal for Ireland.

I look forward to a positive, constructive and well-informed national debate and to our ratification of the



European Constitution.

Thank you.