

Interview with Nicolas Schmit on the Luxembourg Government's awareness campaign for the Constitutional Treaty (RTL, 9 May 2005)

Caption: On 9 May 2005, in an interview for RTL radio, Nicolas Schmit, Luxembourg Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs, outlines the aims of the Luxembourg Government's information campaign on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and how the campaign will be conducted.

Source: Interview avec Nicolas Schmit au sujet de la campagne d'information du gouvernement luxembourgeois sur le traité constitutionnel. [EN LIGNE]. [Luxembourg]: Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg- Service Information et Presse, [09.06.2005]. Disponible sur http://www.gouvernement.lu/salle_presse/Interviews/20050510schmit_rtl/index.html.

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Frank Goetz: And as we said earlier, you can find the discussion forum on the Chamber of Deputies website www.chd.lu. And the government has set out its information at www.verfassung-fir-europa.lu. But in spite of all the information, campaigns and explanations about the European Constitution many people remain sceptical and don't yet know which way to vote on 10 July. We'll be talking to Nicolas Schmit, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs, about what, in some cases, amounts to a real fear. Good evening.

Nicolas Schmit: Good evening.

Frank Goetz: Mr Schmit, last Friday in the Chamber of Deputies one of our citizens reminded us of the words 'We want to remain what we are'. As a European politician, can you understand this fear of losing part of our national sovereignty?

Nicolas Schmit: I fully understand our motto, but I can't see how Europe could represent a danger for this motto. After all, the European motto is 'United in diversity', in other words we have a lot in common but we maintain our diversity. And that diversity means being Luxembourgers, with all that that entails, and remaining Luxembourgers within a Europe that does in fact allow us to remain Luxembourgers.

Frank Goetz: In other words we don't need to give up our identity for the sake of a European identity.

Nicolas Schmit: No, I mean nobody is asking the French to stop being French or the Czechs to stop being Czech or the Luxembourgers to stop being Luxembourgish. Everyone remains what they are, but at the same time they are all European and I believe that that's a big plus.

Frank Goetz: It's noticeable that many commentators are angry about a possible military expansion in Europe as a result of the new Treaty. Why would or should Europe increase its military strength at all in the future?

Nicolas Schmit: I think it's wrong to say that this Constitution would set off a new arms race. What's quite clear is that if we want Europe to have a stronger voice in the world, then we have to provide the means to do that, and that includes military means to make that voice heard in the world. And not in order to fight wars. Not in order to occupy other countries, but precisely so that in specific situations we can restore peace. We were all shocked when the Yugoslav crisis blew up in the early 1990s and the Europeans effectively just looked on. They didn't have the resources to intervene more rapidly or more efficiently. Similar situations have arisen in Europe since then, in Kosovo for example, and on an almost permanent basis in Africa. Europe needs the means to be able to carry out credible peace-keeping missions in this context.

Frank Goetz: That's why many Luxembourgers are wondering whether, for example, national service might be reintroduced here.

Nicolas Schmit: Absolutely not. In my opinion these are inflammatory arguments. Bringing back national service is completely out of the question. In any case the tendency everywhere now is to abolish national service, and that's because the kind of army we need these days is not one that can take on a powerful enemy, but one that can take specific action, primarily to restore peace in a particular part of the world.

Frank Goetz: OK. So 30 000 copies of the Treaty have been sent out. The question is, will people read it? What do you think?

Nicolas Schmit: I don't think that they will read the whole thing. That might be asking a bit much, but they might read the most important parts. And the most important parts, and at the same time the most innovative, are Part I and Part II, but people should also look at Part III. This is of course where the policies are outlined. It isn't always explained in the simplest terms, but I think that people are interested in having a closer look at the whole thing.

Frank Goetz: But it's not just a matter of reading it. People need to understand it too, and that's why you're sending out brochures explaining it a little more simply. But will these simplified explanations be enough for people to be fully informed by 10 July?

Nicolas Schmit: There are a number of ways for people to get information. The first is just to have a look at the text of the Treaty itself. The second is via the brochures, which give a general picture of what's in the Constitution, what's new and what's different from the existing treaties. And the third is of course the Internet. I think this gives people a chance to ask questions and receive answers. And there will be a whole series of debates going on throughout the country, and in my view these debates won't just involve a handful of people, but they should involve people who come along with some ideas and want to get more accurate information, ask questions and have things explained. So I think that anyone who is interested in the subject has plenty of opportunities for information, explanations and discussion.

Frank Goetz: For those who are against Europe there's probably not much more you can do, but what about the rest? In the two months you still have, what else are you going to do to bring those who oppose the Constitution over to your side?

Nicolas Schmit: I think that many of those who are against the Constitution have a reason, but that their reasons are quite diverse. As you well know, some of the opponents are against Europe full stop. You quoted some words earlier and, well, they do seem to come from a particular quarter. Then there are people who say that the social aspects of the Constitution are not strong enough and that's why they oppose this Constitution. I think it's hard to get around that and people have to have the right simply to be against it. Others are still undecided, and it's quite all right to have doubts and ask questions, but that's why we are holding a referendum, to help ordinary citizens take part in an exchange of questions and answers, and I think that, all things considered, we have set in place an extensive dialogue including public meetings. This evening after this programme I'll be going out to meet members of the public and talk about this, and anyone who wants to find out more will have the opportunity to do so.

Frank Goetz: Nicolas Schmit, thank you very much for coming into the studio today.

Nicolas Schmit: Thank you.