

Speech by Bertie Ahern at the signing ceremony of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (Rome, 29 October 2004)

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Presidents, colleagues, fellow Europeans and friends,

Signature of the European Constitution is a crucial step forward in the development of our Union. It is fitting that it should take place here, in the ancient heart of this magnificent city and in this beautiful building where our visionary predecessors gathered half-a-century ago.

The signatories of the Treaty of Rome were resolved, in their own words, to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty, and they called upon the other peoples of Europe who shared their ideal, to join in their efforts. From 1957 to 2004, the original six nations represented in Rome have now become twenty-five, and more are on course to join us in the years ahead.

Those who took the first steps on the road of European integration would have taken particular pleasure in the accession of ten new Member States on 1 May.

As we marked the occasion together in Dublin, there was a palpable sense that we were finally closing a bleak chapter in Europe's history. We face the future with optimism and determination.

Enlargement is an inspiration for the EU. It has provided, and will provide, the impetus for closer, deeper and more effective cooperation between us.

The first great challenge we faced together was the completion of the negotiations on the Constitution. As twenty-five, we needed within a few weeks of 1 May, to resolve very difficult issues.

The negotiations on the Constitution challenged the credibility of the Union. We had committed ourselves to reaching agreement. Nobody expected this to be simple, during what was a testing time internally and externally. Once again Europe proved that it could function effectively. The agreement on the Constitution provides convincing and irrefutable evidence that the EU of 25 can take important decisions for the future of our people.

I found the same degree of commitment and determination in every capital I visited before the June European Council, and the proof of this came in the final discussions in Brussels. Instead of the feared gridlock and political paralysis, we found within ourselves the political will to achieve an honourable and balanced compromise.

The Constitution is a truly European Constitution to which all Member States, new and old, large and small, contributed on an equal basis. It is not a victory for anyone Member State. It is instead our collective achievement and our common success.

This is a Constitution which defines our shared European values and aspirations and which enshrines and vindicates the rights of our citizens. It is a Constitution of and for the 21st Century Europe.

It strikes the right balance in defining which matters we can best deal with together and which are the preserve of individual Member States. At the core of the new Constitution, we find the national identities of Europe's peoples.

In replacing the existing tangle of Treaties, it simplifies and clarifies the legacy of the past fifty years, without casting it aside.

It enhances the powers of directly-elected representatives, both in our national parliaments and in the European Parliament.

It is of fundamental importance that all twenty-five Member States now ratify the European Constitution convincingly and on time. The process of ratification will not be easy, but, with energy and determination, it can and will be successful.

The Constitution equips the growing Union to function effectively and efficiently into the future. Our citizens expect the Union to live up to their ambitions. We, all of us, must ensure that our common institutions are effective and that we can deliver results which improve the daily lives of our citizens.

I am confident that the institutions we have designed will be durable enough, and flexible enough, to help the Union meet the changing expectations of its citizens and to play a full part in a globalising and turbulent world.

Today is an occasion for celebration. But it is also an occasion for a fresh commitment to Europeans working together to ensure that the 21st century Europe is a beacon of stability, prosperity, peace and justice in the 21st century world.

Thank you.