Ratify the Constitution – Strengthen EU Democracy

By Giovanni Grevi, John Palmer and Guillaume Durand

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This paper is designed to stimulate discussion about the challenges raised in the campaigns to secure ratification of the proposed European Union Constitutional Treaty. It forms part of the European Policy Centre "Political Europe" Integrated Work Programme. Other papers linked to the referendum debate and its outcome will follow.

Introduction

There is no mistaking the nervousness with which all those concerned with the future of Europe view the ratification process of the EU Constitutional Treaty now under way. Although the Treaty has been approved in 6 Member States by Parliamentary ratification, Spain is so far the only one of the 10 Member States to vote "Yes," in a popular referendum. The Spanish result boosted the morale of those who believe the Treaty is essential for an enlarging Union, which is charged with ever-greater responsibilities on behalf of its citizens. But it is an open secret that the greatest test of public support is yet to come.

To judge by current public opinion polls, there is a serious risk that the Constitutional Treaty may be rejected in two important Member States – France and the United Kingdom. There is also a lesser - but still tangible risk - that the "Yes" campaign may fail to succeed in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. Although the polls appear more positive in Denmark and Ireland, both of these countries have also produced negative results when EU Treaties have been put to referendum in the past. Elsewhere the odds of a positive outcome appear much greater.

This is hardly a very encouraging scenario. From a legal standpoint, a rejection of the Treaty in even one Member State would prevent it from coming into force, unless the country in question ratifies the text at a second stage. The definitive rejection of the Treaty in one of the founding Member States of the original European Community would surely risk plunging the Union into a political/constitutional crisis.

Such a crisis would not only seriously imperil the capacity of the Union to manage its external affairs – even as it is set to enlarge still further in the years ahead and to play a key role in enhancing effective multilateralism – but would make it even more difficult to resolve many of the internal problems the EU now faces, including the reform of the European economy and an agreement on the Financial Perspectives for the Union budget for 2007-2013. Some have warned of the growing pressures on the euro if treaty rejection is added to other doubts about the internal coherence of the single currency system.

It is not difficult to see how rejection might also diminish the influence and leadership, which the European Union can bring to bear in responding to the global challenges of our time. It is all too possible that rejection of the Treaty might set in motion a dialectic of negative developments at Member State and Union level which could lead to a de *facto* suspension of the process of enlargement (after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania). That would not be helpful for the process of stability and reform in the wider European neighbourhood.

This paper does not focus on the very different domestic issues, which play such an important role in determining the outcome of the current referenda. Rather it seeks to focus on what common elements are to be found across the Union, which contribute to the alienation felt by voters and in some cases the misunderstanding among important sectors of public opinion. It also addresses the longer-term problem of how to promote and strengthen the Union's still embryonic, trans-national democratic polity, which promises to give citizens a real sense of shaping the future political direction taken by the Union.

But first and foremost our principle task must be to mobilize every political resource to win the battle for the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. The Treaty lays the foundations for a Union, which is better able to respond to the aspirations and needs of its Member States and its peoples. It also paves the way towards more open and accountable policy-making at the European level and the development of a sphere of public political debate across the Union.

The paradoxes of the European Union

Many people are puzzled at what appears to be a strange paradox at the heart of the European Union experience. On the one hand, the Union has proven to be an immensely attractive model for societies far beyond the boundaries of the European continent itself. On the other hand, large parts of European public opinion are unhappy with the state and direction of the European integration process, and are prepared to turn the Constitutional Treaty down.

Looking at past and recent achievements, there is no shortage of reasons to be proud. Conversely, this is no time for self-congratulatory behaviour and simple acceptance of what has been achieved. At closer scrutiny, many of the extraordinary accomplishments of European integration have left large sectors of Europe's public opinion with open questions and deep-rooted concerns. Today's Europe risks falling victim to its own success.

As the policy remit of the Union has grown wider, expectations have grown in parallel. A diffuse sense of economic, social and cultural insecurity clashes with the earlier predictions of the benefits that European integration would deliver. In other words, the 'output legitimacy' of the Union – that is the credibility and support acquired by the Union on the basis of its policy output – is not yet firmly recognised by parts of the public across different Member States. This basic problem cannot be overlooked, and should be taken into account when reviewing the landmark achievements of European integration.

The European Union has just enlarged to include ten new countries. Although this is a source of concern for some people, many others see it as a source of strength and pride. While it takes time to digest new members, there is no structural reason why the Union should break or weaken over the medium term, providing the governance of the Union keeps pace with its development. Attracting new members is hardly a problem. Adapting the rules and practices of the EU institutions is the real challenge for the future. Rejecting the Constitutional Treaty would be a step back and would in no way help strengthen the governance of a larger Union.

The European Union is the largest zone of peace and stability in the world. Although taken for granted today, with the partial exception of the Western Balkans, this is an achievement of historic significance on a continent, which has known centuries of conflict. Recurring tensions on the borders of the Union should remind Europeans that history could only too easily repeat itself. Peace is not a given, but a goal to work for every day. This is why the Union should not enter a new stage of introverted soul-searching. It should adopt the Constitutional Treaty instead and trigger an open debate including civil society representatives in an effort to better define its role in support of global governance.

The European Union projects stability in its neighbourhood and is a model for countries and peoples in the world. The Union may not always have been sufficiently proactive in establishing bridges with its 'near abroad.' But the new European Neighbourhood Policy is an important first step toward building far-reaching strategic partnerships involving countries from Byelorussia to Morocco. 'No country left behind' is the purpose of EU action in the neighbourhood. This extends the promise of peace, stability and democracy far and wide, to the south and the east of the Union's borders. At the same time, it should be made clear that the destiny of these countries is not EU membership, but a close partnership with the Union of a mutually beneficial nature.

The European Union is prosperous by most reasonable standards. Although by some measures the European economy is losing its competitive edge, it retains impressive strengths. Following enlargement, living standards disparities within the Union have grown. At the same time, the economic downturn of a number of key economies of the Eurozone has not been reversed. However, poor economic governance, and not enlargement, is the source of slow growth and rising unemployment. The new members are injecting an economic dynamic into the EU, which will, eventually, help close the wealth gap with Western Europe. The Union as a whole will benefit increasingly from this dynamic. But inevitably, Europeans will resist any drive to lower social and environmental standards in the process. More must be done to ensure the territorial and social cohesion of the Union. Policies designed to support less favoured areas are problematic with respect to their adoption and implementation but they are now part of the DNA of the Union and will be, progressively, adjusted to new needs. This must also become a matter for pan-European democratic debate well beyond the adoption of the Constitutional Treaty.

European societies are among the most cohesive in the world. Models vary across the Union and are by no means uniform. Most Member States, however, share a commitment to social welfare unparalleled in other developed economies. Some of the new Member States are, understandably, primarily concerned with faster economic growth. But the Union as a whole has much to learn from its Nordic members. They have demonstrated that competitiveness and innovation can support – and not counteract – social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

Europe is an attractive destination of global migration. This poses challenges as well as major opportunities. While a conservative reflex is understandable when public opinion is confronted with seemingly rapid societal change, the enormous contribution that migrants can bring to our aging societies should be more positively acknowledged. Moreover, the European Union offers a suitable framework to enhance the integration of migrants and to support inter-cultural dialogue, a major dimension in the future of European societies and of international relations in general. Europe can provide real added value not only in the coordination of national policies, but also in the promotion of a major education campaign aimed at involving people across Europe in a public debate on the shared challenge of migration and integration.

Europe Union Member States have just adopted an unprecedented Constitution (CT). The new Treaty is the result of two-and-a-half years of deliberation and negotiation involving as many as 28 governments, members of the European Parliament and of national parliaments, and countless experts and representatives of civil society. The very fact that the

text has been agreed upon is a major achievement. Furthermore, the CT includes a number of major innovations, reflects and consolidates previous accomplishments and in no way reverses them.

The different 'No-s'

Major accomplishments have often been followed by profound changes and imbalances. Transformations in Europe are – in many ways - a subset of major global trends, to which they constitute a response. The combination of achievements, changes and challenges is such that adjustment is difficult for both policy-makers and public opinion. The former may not get the policy mix right the first time around. The latter is disoriented and concerned with an unpredictable and accelerating pattern of developments. Inadequate policy recipes and growing concerns about the future to some extent explain why a number of Europeans may be prepared to reject the new Constitution in referenda in a number of key Member States. What is less clear is whether a majority of Europeans would be willing to throw the Union into crisis and risk reversing the benefits and achievements of European integration.

Such an outcome may not be what some advocates of the 'No' want – notably in France. The opponents of the Treaty might be best grouped into two quite different categories. There are those who will vote 'no' precisely to halt and if possible undermine the historic process of European integration and unification. But many others argue for a more, not a less ambitious Union. They criticise the inadequacy of the EU – for example in social and foreign policy.

According to these critics of the Treaty – again mostly in France – rejection would pave the way toward the negotiation of a better, more ambitious Treaty which would affirm a stronger commitment to political Union and a "social Europe." But there is not the slightest reason to believe that – in the foreseeable future – the defeat of the Treaty would result in a new constitutional process which would produce a Constitution with farther reaching economic, social and political objectives.

More generally, the Treaty is rejected by parts of the public opinion for completely contradictory reasons. More often than not, the grievances, which fuel opposition to the Treaty, have absolutely nothing to do with the Treaty or even with the EU as such. Disillusionment with or hostility toward national governments on purely domestic issues often expresses itself in terms of hostility toward the Union. Until a European polity with firm foundations is shaped, the danger that the European Union's progress will be at risk of becoming collateral damage in purely domestic Member State political conflict remains.

Questioning the direction of integration

Moreover, as noted above, the state and direction of the European integration process are increasingly contested. Too many people feel a growing distance between their own concerns and aspirations and what they see as the remote institutions and decision-making processes of the Union. Many find it difficult to understand who is responsible for what in the sometimes complex division of governance responsibilities between the Member States (and regions) and the EU institutions. Some are hostile to the direction taken by EU decision-makers. Others are at a loss to understand how they can effectively hold the decision-makers to account or to help shape the strategic directions and priorities of the European Union.

It is not good to simply assume that people are mistaken because they do not understand. Indeed, if that is the case, the responsibility primarily lies with those responsible for the way in which policy is decided and decisions are taken within the EU. Thus, to a very large extent, it lies with Member State governments. But regardless of who is or is not responsible, there is a more fundamental question. Serious progress on the road to an "ever closer Union" can now no longer be achieved in the absence of popular endorsement. The days of a "benevolent conspiracy" or "top-down" leadership driving European integration are over.

> Winning the confidence, loyalty and participation of a solid majority of citizens is the core challenge if European integration is to survive and deepen over the long-term. The root causes of the current crisis must be thoroughly examined with a view not only to avoid the imminent danger of a 'no' vote, but also to ensure that the gap between Europe's decision-making institutions and its citizens is progressively eliminated.

The contested legitimacy of the Union

The enlarged Union is diverse and heterogeneous – a factor to be reckoned with when attempting to provide general insights into European trends. But growing disaffection with EU institutions and politics is a pan-European phenomenon that requires comprehensive scrutiny.

Common to most national debates is that Europeans feel they have no influence on the direction and priorities of European integration. Europe's agenda is not set by them and is unclear to citizens who really does set the agenda. At the same time, however, they increasingly care because they understand that Europe matters. Few people today deny that Europe is relevant to their daily lives. The problem is that too many people question, whether the European Union is truly of any benefit to them. Confronted with a growing sense of insecurity, there is a tendency to see Europe as part of the problem, and not as a key part of the solution.

Although it should not be exaggerated, there is a perceived gap between people's priorities and Europe's priorities in at least a few important Member States. On the other hand, however, only a relatively limited number of people argue that Europe should have no place – or no significant place – in their lives. A far more common complaint heard in the different referendum campaigns is that Europe should be more accountable, and responsive to its citizens. Otherwise trust will erode still further.

This raises the question of the much-discussed legitimacy gap, which bedevils the progress of European integration. It is essential to be clear on the **meaning of legitimacy**.

- An authority is legitimate if people freely accept it. Popular consent to be governed is a basic tenet of democratic legitimacy. Such consensus is rooted in the national traditions of each country, often constructed through periods of civil and inter-state wars. The legitimacy of national institutions is taken for granted today, but it took centuries to consolidate it.

- Not all institutions within each Member State enjoy the same level of legitimacy. At a more general level, popular confidence in national governments and national institutions varies considerably across the Union.

- Legitimacy is not cast in stone, but subject to permanent evolution: popular feelings towards public authorities and the way, in which they exercise power, change. Those institutions that do not adapt fall into disrepute and eventually disappear.

- In Western democracies, one increasingly important feature of legitimacy is accountability – that is the answerability of public authorities to elected assemblies, other consultative bodies and public opinion at large. Governments are legitimate not only because they are elected, but also because they 'stay tuned' and respond to voters during their time in office.

- The impact of mass media has enhanced this latter dimension of accountability, and has made the relationship between the head of the executive and public opinion an increasingly prominent component of the legitimacy of the overall framework. The 'personalisation' of politics embodies this trend.

What does this all mean for the fragile and contested legitimacy of the European Union? Taking the key features of democratic legitimacy at national level as a starting point, a number of serious **shortcomings** of democratic legitimacy at the European level should be highlighted, and not hidden.

- There is no common history that binds Europeans in the same way as national communities. Europeans have shared wars but not state building. Hence, there is no developed European polity as such – thus far.

- Citizens have some understanding of the respective functions of national governments, parliaments and courts. But understanding of the functions of executive, legislative and judicial bodies at the European level is far less common. This is in part because the way the different European decision-making bodies function and interact is different from familiar national models. It is difficult to understand the interplay between European and national authorities.

  The legitimacy of the European institutions was rarely challenged during the first decades of the Union's existence. The "top down" approach of this period played an enormously positive role in creating the (then) European Community (later Union), its institutions and its common policies. Today legitimacy is subject to a far more demanding test, as citizens demand greater accountability from those who act at the European level on their behalf. This is a reflection of the far more overt "political" character of the European Union agenda today. At the same time, a generational change among the elites has also weakened the support base of European integration. In the past Member State political leaders were more willing than many of today's politicians to balance a defence of national interests with a defence of the collective European interest.

- There is a growing public recognition that European integration entails much more than the opening of markets (which, in itself, has become somewhat more problematic over time). Some parts of public opinion feel that their national elites "sold" the cause of the European Union under a false pretence - as a purely economic convenience rather than a strategic political commitment. In addition to the increasing salience of policy issues for public opinion, there is confusion about who takes the initiative at European level.

- Beyond legalistic formulations, accountability is also a problem for the Union. First, there is no government, only a hybrid executive authority, which for some important purposes is the Commission but for others is the Council representing the Member States. Second, national governments play a double role – executive and legislative –, which obfuscates effective democratic scrutiny at both the national and EU levels. Third, in spite of its more influential role in the decision-making process, the European voter has next to no knowledge or understanding of the European Parliament.

- The media does not take much interest in European affairs. Too often reporting of the Union is given a narrow – and frequently distorted - national focus. As yet, few if any genuinely European political personalities have emerged with the stature to command widespread media attention. It is hardly surprising that the people feel neither properly informed nor meaningfully connected to the politics of the Union.

That being said, the legitimacy of national institutions is also increasingly being contested. In some countries, people trust European institutions more than national ones, out of dissatisfaction with the performance of the latter. More generally, however, national institutions are under pressure because they struggle to deliver, given the major global forces shaping policy options and priorities. Over the long-term, citizens will lose confidence in institutions that have proven inadequate to deliver on their expectations. This gives Europe a chance to strengthen its legitimacy in the eyes of Europeans. In perspective, going beyond a strictly national approach on legitimacy, Europe has a lot of **assets**.

- European citizens may not be bound together by a shared history, but a shared future unites them. Only far-right groupings would deny that today. Legitimacy has to take root somewhere, and the ground of the common challenges, shared values and increasingly joint instruments underpinning integration could prove very fertile.

- If it is true that a proper understanding of the functioning of the Union precedes a sense of allegiance, then focussing on education and on the dissemination of information becomes a priority. That is a difficult and expensive undertaking, but my no means impossible.

- Confronted with a generational change among the elites and with exposure to public opinion and popular perceptions, the European Union and its institutions need to be proactive. It is, however, clear that not much can be achieved if the European project is neglected or undermined by national leaders and political elites – whether advertently or inadvertently. An effective partnership between European and national institutions is a *sine qua non* for the development of the Union. In the end, the Member States have nothing to gain from acquiescing to the weakening of the Union and its institutions.

- European institutions are uniquely positioned to provide common solutions to common problems. In truth, the Constitutional Treaty marks only a modest advance in terms of effective decision by qualified majority vote – particularly in the areas of foreign and economic policy. But the alternative approach – inter-governmental cooperation – has proven ineffective in these and other fields. European citizens are perfectly capable of understanding that and few would favour the consolidation of the inter-governmental framework of governance that might well be the result of the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. The Constitutional Treaty enhances, albeit modestly, the ability of Europeans to play a greater part in EU politics. National parliaments in particular will play a more prominent role and will become more active 'stakeholders' in the process of making European legitimacy complementary to national legitimacy. Of course a key lacuna, which still remains to be bridged in many Member States, is a proper and effective strengthening of the control of the European policy of governments by their national parliaments. But in this respect, a stronger European Parliament is an ally not a rival of national parliaments in a joint objective to buttress a more effective democratic scrutiny of decision-makers.

Where to from here?

With regards to the strengths and weaknesses of democratic legitimacy of the European integration process, the CT does not create *ipso facto* a European polity but it undoubtedly and decisively paves the way towards this goal. While the legitimacy and accountability gaps in the Union are a reality, the CT addresses these concerns by making the rules governing the Union simpler, more transparent, more efficient and more democratic. Some relevant provisions of the Treaty should be highlighted:

- **Simplification:**

    - Single Treaty: very long but at least comprehensive and consolidated (all previous treaties are repealed); first part sets out in a clear and intelligible manner the basic principles underpinning the functioning of the Union.

    - Single legal personality: the Union will be able to sign and ratify international treaties in its own name (currently, only the European Community has a legal personality).

- **Transparency:**

    - Openness of all legislative meetings of the Council: a potentially very powerful tool for national parliaments/national public opinion to hold their governments accountable for the policies they pursue at European level.

    - Repartition of competences: for the first time, a list of the Union's competences has been drawn up, distinguishing between exclusive competences, shared competences and areas for supporting action, thus clarifying the 'who does what' question for citizens.

    - Legal instruments: directives become European framework laws and regulations become European laws. These new denominations make it explicit that the Union is a democratic entity producing laws of great relevance to citizens and not some sort of technocratic body, issuing vague directives or technical regulations on obscure issues.

    - The Financial Perspectives become a legal instrument of the Union under the name of Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF). The right of the Parliament to approve the MFF is enshrined in the CT.

- **Efficiency:**

- Qualified Majority Voting (QMV): the complex and largely unfair power-sharing arrangement of the Nice Treaty is made more understandable (55% of the Member States representing at least 65% of the population) and more efficient (it will become easier to pass legislation).

- External relations: thanks to the creation of a European Foreign Minister who will supervise a single European External Action Service and to simplified and more efficient procedures, the Union will be in a position to better defend its interests on the international stage – a central concern of citizens in the light of global developments (trade, environment, migrations, terrorism).

- Justice and Home Affairs: QMV becomes the rule for asylum and immigration, all aspects of judicial cooperation in civil matters (except family law) and most aspects of judicial cooperation in penal matters.

- **Democracy:**

- The European Parliament (EP) is given more powers: co-decision (renamed: ordinary legislative procedure) and QMV become the general procedure; the budgetary power of the EP is extended; the link between the European Parliament and the choice of the President of the Commission is strengthened.

- The Charter: it is incorporated into the body of the Constitution and becomes one of its building blocks (part II). This underlines that the Union is also a community of values and that it has to respect fundamental rights in its action. In particular, this is likely to set significant limits on the domination of the single market rationale in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice.

- The role of national Parliaments is enhanced, in particular in the implementation of the subsidiarity principle.

Building a future European democratic polity

Winning the referendum campaign is only the first step in addressing the underlying issues of legitimacy and accountability addressed here. A much more vibrant and long-term commitment is necessary to set the legitimacy of the Union on the firm basis of widespread popular consent. That requires education, information, communication, participation, and a real partnership between national and European institutions, including a politicisation of the European level.

At the heart of the alienation from the Union and its institutions felt by too many of our citizens, is a wider sense of having "lost ownership" of the direction taken by the EU. Sometimes this frustration with all things European is misunderstood as a manifestation of the lack of information on EU affairs available to the public. There is always scope for improved information – in the past too little imagination has been used in devising information and using different channels to get it out to the public.

But the problem Europe faces collectively is about much more than mere information. In some ways citizens feel overwhelmed by the magnitude and the complexity of the information, which they receive from so many different sources involved in the business of the European Union. Information is not the same as effective communication. Information – the dissemination of a myriad of facts and other data – cannot be a substitute to a communications strategy designed to highlight key strategic issues where citizens can be expected to have opinions as well as an interesting in reacting. Moreover – neither information, nor communication can serve as a substitute in for effective democratic participation in contemporary society.

In terms of more effective communication, it is essential for Member States to accept their shared responsibility with the EU institutions for both the content of the communication messages and the manner in which these are delivered. At present, Member States seem happy, by and large, to leave communications to the EU institutions, which – by themselves – lack sufficient authority and democratic legitimacy for their messages to have the impact desired. This failure to share responsibility for the Union's overall communications – or worse still, a tendency to undermine some of its key messages – has directly contributed to the worrying problem of the "credibility gap" between the public and the public.

Apart from relatively small special interest groups – including political, bureaucratic, diplomatic, business and civil society elites – most members of the public do not become involved in political affairs – at any level, local, regional, national or European – unless or until they are presented

with having to make choices. Thus far, European citizens have not been asked to make any judgments about the strategic direction taken by the Union. Since 1979, direct elections to the European Parliament have effectively been fought on purely national and domestic issues. The outcome of these elections has been – above all – determined by the popularity of the government in office**.**

The problem is not that European politics raise contentious and divisive issues. This is surely inevitable also. As the EU agenda widens and deepens – because of the nature of the challenges the Union faces at home and globally – it is entirely natural that there should be argument – even passionate argument – about the direction the EU should take. The challenge is to give citizens the time, space and context in which to express their differing views and perspectives on the future evolution and direction of EU policy and strategy without having EU affairs held hostage by separate and often completely unrelated issues at the heart of domestic Member State politics.

Without an underlying sense of shared ownership of the European integration process between EU institutions, Member States and the public, messages delivered by the executive authorities (whether the Council of Ministers or the Commission) will tend to be viewed with misunderstanding, suspicion and even hostility. The primary means by which voters assume ownership of the key EU decisions must be through being given serious choices over policy and strategy in European Parliament elections. If this is to become reality, it is essential that the embryonic European Parliament political "families" become fully fledged European political parties. The emerging European parties have to assert their identities, their competing programmes and their rival political leaderships far more actively in the public arena. An analogy might be drawn with what happened to the political parties when administration and law making was devolved to the regions within Member States. In these cases the different parties retained close links with their "federal" national sister parties. But they also cleared space to develop their own identity and distinctive policies at the regional level. This process must now begin at the European Union level. The provisions in the Constitutional Treaty can further this goal (on legal identity and funding of parties) *IF* it is approved.

It may be argued that – even at the national level – political parties appear weaker and less prestigious than in past years. Membership of political parties seems to be in decline and in too many countries voter turnout in elections has been disappointing. But this phenomenon is in part linked to a widespread public perception that there are fewer political choices between the parties. To put it another way – the mainstream political parties occupy a diminishing space. That space has diminished in part because Member States are for some purposes too big – hence the growing

support for devolution. But –given the massive impact of globalisation - for other purposes they are too small. That is the structural force, which pushes Member States towards the sharing of sovereignty in areas of policy where effective action at the purely national level is no longer possible.

Naturally, there is a limit to the political space, which is open to decision-makers at the European level to demonstrate different strategies and policies. But few would deny that for major issues of macro-economic, environmental, foreign, security and defence policies the Union collectively has the room to act, which is denied to individual Member States. That space provides an opportunity for political parties to offer real alternatives to the voting public.

There are other, more long-term and possibly more fundamental changes, which are necessary. We need to examine the significance of the rise of other civil society organisations and special interest campaigns. There is increasing evidence that people see these voluntary sector bodies as at least as important as conventional parties for achieving their aspirations and goals. This implies the need for a radical further development of the existing consultative process of policy-making within the Union. The gradual progress, which has been made in terms of greater openness and transparency in the EU in recent years, must go much further.

These and other longer-term reforms will not all be fully realised in the Constitutional Treaty. But the ratification of the Constitution will open the way toward a continuing evolution in the European Union as a democratic polity. Rejection of the Treaty risks freezing the entire process at a time when the Union is being called on to shoulder ever-greater responsibilities. It risks breathing life into the atavistic forces of populism and nationalism, which are incapable of rising to the challenges of the 21st century. Ratification of the Constitutional Treaty remains essential.

Giovanni Grevi is Associate Director of Studies of the EPC, John Palmer is the Political Director of the EPC, and Guillaume Durand is a Policy Analyst at the EPC.

(The European Policy Centre "Political Europe" Integrated Work Programme is actively concerned with many of the issues detailed above. For further information please contact the EPC at www.theepc.be)