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To reject constitution could be fateful for EU

By Neal Ascherson, Lord Garden and Will Hutton

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From Mr Neal Ascherson, Lord Garden, Mr Will Hutton and others.

Sir, There is much talk in Britain of the advantages of a No to the European constitution in the French referendum on Sunday.

Many suggest a rejection would be fortunate for Tony Blair, suddenly freed from the embarrassment of a British referendum that could turn out to be a humiliation. To ask, and worry about, what it may mean for the wider picture is regarded as unsophisticated.

Let us be unsophisticated for a moment. All across Europe we have just laid wreaths and shaken veterans' hands to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of second world war. That, and the war that preceded it, are the essential inspiration for the unprecedented way of living together as peoples that is the European Union.

The survival and political health of such a structure is a serious matter. We take it for granted. But the Union is fragile, and great political chances can be lost for a lifetime, and sometimes for ever.

Rejection of the constitution could prove fateful to a union that, for all its deficiencies, is a beacon of peace, prosperity and good political sense throughout the world. It has helped to establish free and stable societies among its neighbours, and it is still doing so in countries traumatised by half a century of totalitarianism.

The constitution seeks to bring together the agreements that have underpinned the EU since the first Treaty of Rome in 1957, and it does more than that. It enshrines citizens' rights, adds provisions to make the newly enlarged Union more democratic and effective, and carefully balances the EU social model with the flexibility needed to compete in a globalised market. We hope the French people will vote Yes in the referendum on Sunday. It will greatly encourage us, their fellow Europeans, to campaign at home for the same result.

Neal Ascherson; Christopher Bobinski; Richard Corbett MEP (Labour spokesman for EU constitutional affairs); Brendan Donnelly (President, Federal Trust); Andrew Duff MEP (Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); Sue Garden; Lord Garden (Liberal Democrat Defence Affairs Spokesman); Kirsty Hughes; Will Hutton; Richard Laming (Director, Federal Union); Phillip Souta; Edward Steen; Zygmunt Tyszkiewicz

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