

## [Comment] Writing history

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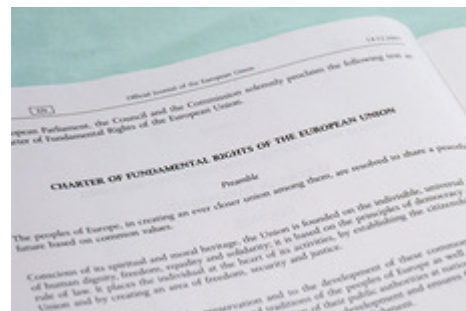
Today @ 08:27 CET

EUOBSERVER / COMMENT - Czech president Vaclav Klaus wants to write his name in the history books. But is he choosing to make the right kind of history?

The Lisbon treaty, having been negotiated and agreed by the 27 national governments of the European Union, and ratified by all of their parliaments, and even passed by a referendum in Ireland, now sits on President Klaus' desk, awaiting his signature. But he cannot make up his mind to sit down and sign the treaty. Mont Blanc or Parker, or maybe a Bic biro: which pen to choose from?

But perhaps President Klaus has something more weighty on his mind.

After all, the Lisbon treaty is a complicated document, embodying as it does a compromise between the different political traditions and ideas of 27 countries. It is ironic that the people who complain most about the complexity of the treaty are the very same people who would complain if it was simple, if simplicity were achieved by straightening and standardising and ironing out all those features that make Europe the diverse and fascinating place that it is. Better to accept complexity for the time being, if that is what it takes to get an agreement.



The Charter of Fundamental Rights  
- President Klaus is objecting to it  
(Photo: wikipedia)

And indeed that is what it takes. Since the Laeken summit in December 2001 started the whole process of revising the Nice treaty, only 2 out of the original 15 heads of government are still in office (Jean-Claude Juncker of Luxembourg and Silvio Berlusconi of Italy, and one of them has served time in opposition during the intervening period). In fact, as many as 67 different people have served as head of government of a member state during that time, each of which was armed with a

national veto. Complexity is inevitable, I'm afraid.

But despite these difficulties, the 27 member states have enough interests in common to make trying to agree a common set of rules worthwhile, and enough mutual goodwill to be able to reach agreement. They knew the importance of a successful reform.

But failure remains a possibility, as long as President Klaus refuses to sign.

He claims to have concerns about the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and its impact on Czech land ownership. That is an important subject, to be approached with care, but the Charter does not have the impact that he seems to fear. Leading legal experts are in agreement on this issue: this is not a reason to reject the treaty.

Even more to the point, the Czech parliament has already approved it. The processes of Czech democracy have already given the Lisbon treaty their seal of approval. Why should the president of the Czech Republic frustrate the will of the elected parliament now? How can someone claim to defend parliamentary democracy by violating it?

The treaty is not perfect – no-one can claim that – but it represents the broad consensus in Europe of the best way to run the European Union. In addition to the support from national governments and parliaments, there is the support from voters: two-thirds of the votes cast in the European elections in June were cast for pro-Lisbon parties and candidates.

So, there are not really legal issues at stake, nor are there democratic reasons to block the treaty. What remains is for President Klaus to sign it. Perhaps a kind and good-natured citizen, somewhere in the European Union, can lend him a pen.

*The writer is a commentator on European affairs, based in London, and a member of the board of Federal Union.*