



[Comment] Why Luxembourg should vote Yes

07.07.2005 - 15:53 CET | By Richard Laming

EUOBSERVER / COMMENT - I don't think anyone should be surprised if the people of Luxembourg need quite a lot of persuasion to vote for the European constitution in their referendum this coming Sunday (10 July).

The French and Dutch No votes appear to have killed the text, with all due respect to the Spanish who voted Yes by a large majority themselves.

The constitution needed unanimous agreement and now requires unanimous ratification if it is to come into force.

Now that the French and Dutch have voted No, that unanimous ratification looks out of reach. In which case, why should the Luxembourgers bother to vote Yes?

The old arguments used in France and the Netherlands that the survival of the constitution depended on a Yes vote clearly no longer apply. The constitution is not going to survive, whatever happens.

Similarly into the dustbin goes the suggestion that this is the best way forward for Europe right now.

Building Europe together

We used to argue that the text of the constitution was the expression of the leaders of twenty five countries seeking to build Europe together.

While it may have had some faults from one perspective or another, the fact remained that this was the next stage in the development of Europe and so supporters of European unity should support this text too.

But "remained" is a word in the past tense and that is where it will stay. This text clearly is not the next stage in the development of Europe, not any longer.

We can still point to the ways in which the provisions of the constitution would improve the functioning of the institutions, making them more democratic, more effective and more accountable. But given that those provisions aren't coming into force any time soon, that seems a rather esoteric reason to ask for a Yes vote.

The absence of an immediate consequence for the Luxembourg referendum does not deprive it of all meaning, though.

It may have lost the previous purpose, but with the right campaign, it can be given a new purpose. We simply have to look at it in the right light, and remember that something of this kind has happened before.

Common political future?

In June 1989, there was a referendum in Italy on whether or not to grant the European Parliament the mandate to draft a constitution for Europe.

It was passed by a massive majority. Of course, it was in one sense only a notional vote because there were no similar referendums in the other 11 member states and so there was no chance of it actually coming about as a result of that vote, but in another sense it was a symbolic expression of the opinion of the Italian people. This was the direction in which they

wanted Europe to go.

The people of Luxembourg now find themselves in the same position. They have the chance to vote on the whole of the European project, rather than just the text of this constitution.

The flaws in that text, the unsurprising consequence of a document agreed unanimously by 25 member states, which have dogged Yes campaigners up until now suddenly are no longer the same problem.

Just as the good things about the constitution have been taken off the table, so have its drawbacks.

Fears that the European constitution would undermine the European social model, misplaced in my view, need no longer lead to a No vote. Something bigger and more profound is now at stake.

The bigger question is whether the European Union should try to have a constitution at all. Should the peoples of Europe seek to build a common political future together?

The constitutional text agreed by the IGC last year is clearly dead. The question now is whether Europeans should try to write a better one or whether they should give up on the whole idea.

That is the choice in front of the people of Luxembourg on Sunday. That is why they should vote Yes.

Richard Laming is Director of Federal Union and writes here in a personal capacity.

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Printed from EUobserver.com 07.07.2005

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