

What's next for the European Union?

In referendums last year, a majority of voters in France and the Netherlands voted 'no' to a proposed constitution for the European Union. To better understand the present situation and the EU's near-term prospects, Mondial interviewed two members of the Union of European Federalists. John Parry has written numerous articles on the politics of European integration. He is Honorary Vice-President of the Union of European Federalists. Richard Laming is Director of Federal Union (UEF-U.K.) and Bureau Member of UEF.

Mondial: In referendums last spring, France and the Netherlands rejected a constitutional treaty that had been laboriously negotiated by the European Union's member states, thus effectively vetoing a first-time EU Constitution. Given that a key reason for the proposed Constitution had been to enable a greatly enlarged EU of 25 members to function with a relative degree of effectiveness, what now seems likely to happen as regards addressing this still-unresolved but crucial issue?

Parry: There will certainly be inter-governmental discussions, as the Austrian president announced in an interview on January 1 this year—but about what? The issue is complex, and there is probably no single answer. After a referendum in Denmark rejected the *Maastricht Treaty* [1992] the Danes negotiated an opt-out to certain of the citizenship provisions and then put the question again to the electorate, this time successfully. On the other hand, when

the Irish rejected the *Treaty of Nice* [2000], their government implemented a large-scale information campaign before launching a second referendum on the unchanged text, and won.

Neither of these precedents is likely to be repeated. Opt-outs are almost certainly not in the cards, for surveys of the motives behind the 'no' vote do not point to specific provisions in the Treaty but rather to existing difficulties such as enlargement, immigration, unemployment, and a perceived threat to social welfare. As for repeat referendums in France and the Netherlands on the same text, this would need a fundamental political change in both countries to be acceptable.

But we must not forget that 14 of the 25 member states have already ratified the *Constitutional Treaty*. This represents over 50% of the EU's total population. Can they allow just two states to veto the entire project? As you point out in your question, the Treaty's purpose was to enable the enlarged European Union [soon to contain 27 states] to function effectively, but there was also a secondary motive, namely to bring clarity into the Byzantine collection of treaties under which we operate at present.

This perhaps shows us a way forward. At present, most people still feel that the EU is simply an arrangement between governments, but those same governments – whatever plan they adopt – must also realize they have to carry the electorate with them. Far more must be done to educate citizens to realize that the EU is a new political struc-

ture in which we are all involved. The European Commission is proposing a major campaign of information and dialogue involving the general public; and the EU's Parliament seems likely to agree a proposal to organize joint meetings with national parliamentarians. By means of these wide consultations a refined constitutional text could emerge. If, then, repeat referendums are inevitable, efforts should be made for them to be held on the same day throughout the EU.

Laming: We are likely to see a continuation of the reasons why the European constitution was a good idea in the first place. Economic globalization will surely continue unabated; the environmental consequences of that globalization will do the same; the sense that European values are under threat and need to be defended will not go away; nor will public dissatisfaction with the way in which democratic politics defends those values. The need for a democratic and effective union of Europe grows every day.

Also likely is a mix of reactions from Europe's political leaders. Some hope that the whole issue will now go away. Others, at the more far-sighted end of the spectrum, will realize that the future of Europe is still central to all their other political aspirations. Advocates of a renewed constitutional effort are divided over whether the current ratification process should be continued (it is not officially over, despite the two 'no' votes in France and the Netherlands) or whether thoughts should turn to a new ►

Union of European Federalists

Founded in 1946 in the belief that European federation was necessary to secure peace and stability following World War II, the Union of European Federalists has been active ever since in the struggle for a federal Europe. A constituent member of the International World Federalist Move-



Richard Laming is Director of Federal Union (UEF-U.K.) and Bureau member of UEF.

Federalists working hard on EU consitutional process

ean Federalists

ment, UEF describes itself as a supranational "organization of individual activists" embracing European federalist movements from most European countries. Currently, its main focus is on building a true political, economic and monetary union, including the adoption of an EU Constitution.



John Parry is honorary vice-president of the UEF.

▷ treaty that might overcome current objections. Federal Union (the UK member of UEF) has published its own proposals on what form that new treaty might take.

The next year or so will probably be rather quiet – it has been dubbed a "period of reflection" – but the German government has promised to relaunch the constitutional process when it assumes the presidency of the EU Council of Ministers in 2007. In the meantime, the federalists will be working as hard as possible to ensure that everyone understands the need for a new democratic settlement in Europe.

Mondial: On this side of the Atlantic we are hearing a lot about an ideological split in the EU between those who support a social model that gives a lot of priority to, among other things, protecting workers' rights and interests (decent wages, restrictions on excessive work hours, etc.), and, on the other hand, advocates of market liberalization as a means of increasing wealth and raising living standards. Do you see this issue as a real or a bogus one? And how might one foresee its being played out over the medium-term future?

Laming: The European social model does not divide neatly into two parts. Any social model is based on an interconnecting set of policies and institutions regarding business activity, social welfare, education, planning, employment and many more. In the EU, these policies and institutions are predominantly set at national levels, not European level, as one would

expect from such a federal-type system of government. The notion of two groups of countries, one of which is more European than the other, does not work. To the extent that there is a debate about what the right policies and institutions are, there is a national debate in each country.

Complaints about EU social regulation are a sign of the EU's success and not of its failure. It may come as a surprise to free market anti-Europeans that this should be the case, but what do they know?

Parry: Most Western Europeans regard the "social market" as a major achievement. Our partners in Western Europe often speak of "the anglo-saxon model" by which they mean Britain and the USA, as if those two economic systems were comparable. Seen from London that seems unconvincing. The UK has its "welfare state" which, with its advanced level of public services, is in principle closer to the European social model, though still struggling from the neglect of infrastructure that began under the Thatcher government.

Only in the new, ex-Communist member states is free market fundamentalism on the agenda and that is likely to modify as their economies improve.

Mondial: Almost since the earliest days of what has become the European Union, convergence of the foreign policies of member countries has been a stated objective. Although significant progress has been made in this area, a unified foreign policy remains far from being realized. Does UEF have any reasons for optimism that this might change

anytime soon?

Parry: The EU works well in matters of international trade where the Treaty provisions are truly federal in character and also on world environmental questions where there is clear common interest. In general, collaboration between member states' diplomatic services is very effective. The problem lies at the governmental level where, on more broad-stream foreign policy issues, there is often a marked absence of political will to reach a common EU position. This is particularly the case among the larger member states such as Britain, France and Germany.

Each (European) treaty to date has edged a little farther towards providing the mechanisms needed to enable the EU to speak with one voice in international affairs but this inch-by-inch approach has not always worked.

Britain and France bear much of the responsibility. Reform of the Security Council along the lines of regional representation with the EU occupying a single permanent seat might well provide the trigger.

Meanwhile, the EU does increasingly effective work in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, often in partnership with NATO and/or with UN agencies. Future undertakings are also likely to be of this type rather than involving the use of force. This enables all member states to participate, even those with a tradition of neutrality.

Laming: There are two things that will bring about a more effective and coherent foreign policy. The first is practice. As

Continued on page 10

EU: Reason for optimism but progress slow

Continued from page 9

events proceed, the more that the different member states realize that they have interests in common, the more they will try to work together. It is contingent, of course, on the assumption that they have interests in common: if they don't, then there is no case for a common foreign policy in any case.

We can point to the EU's common diplomacy in the Middle East as an illustration of what the Europeans can achieve together when they try. We could also cite the EU's ability to secure Russian participation in the Kyoto agreement. EU member states have interests in common, as they are discovering.

The second factor is the federal model. A common foreign policy will not be effective if it depends on negotiation amongst the member states for its genesis. The notion of the common interest requires a dedicated advocate, which in the case of the EU is the European Commission. For example, the EU is taking on responsibilities for crisis management in parts of Africa and in some of the countries on its borders. Increasingly, it leads the teams of national representatives when taking or implementing decisions. A good idea is now becoming a habit.

So, in answer to your question about being optimistic, yes, we can be. But it is slow.

Mondial: Despite strong opposition in certain EU countries to Turkey joining the Union, a major development in 2005 was the decision this past October to formally start accession talks with Turkey. What does UEF

see as the main issues that will need to be settled during these negotiations? And what could the implications be, for both the EU itself and beyond, of this Islamic country, with a current population of more than 70 million, becoming a member state?

Laming: The main issues to be settled in negotiation with Turkey are the same issues that had to be settled in previous negotiations, namely the Copenhagen criteria agreed in June 1993. These cover questions of democracy, human rights, a functioning market economy, and a willingness to accept the wider political obligations of EU membership. Every member state has to meet these same rules: there is nothing special about Turkey.

It is the case, nevertheless, that the size of these issues is greater than with other previous entrants, even if they are in principle the same.

The point about Turkey being a Muslim country is tied up with the wider question of what happens to Turkey if it does not join the EU. This is a decision for Turkey itself to take. The opening of negotiations for membership neither takes away the need for this decision nor diminishes its importance. It postpones it, perhaps, as the moment of truth for Turkey will be some years in the future. This represents smart politics by the Turkish pro-Europeans, given that the intervening period will see ever closer contacts between their own citizens and the rest of Europe which will, in turn, build up public willingness to make this choice. Maybe they won't though, but it is a decision for the Turks.

The Turkish candidacy is not

an invitation to the rest of Europe to erect Islam as a stumbling block to EU membership. There is a danger that this becomes no more than simple racism. In many ways, modern Europe is barely Christian – most Europeans have no religious belief whatever and those that do come from a wide range of different theological traditions, both Christian and not. Religion is not a political issue.

Parry: The problems are of two kinds. First, many EU citizens feel that Turks are not Europeans, that they are too numerous to be easily absorbed, that their attitude to human rights and to minorities is both unsatisfactory and incurable, and that the cultural and religious differences are too great. Opponents of Turkey's membership point to Islam as an obstacle, yet millions of Muslims already live in Britain, France, Germany and other EU states. Having the largest population, Turkey would also have more MEPs [members of European parliament] and more votes under the present Qualified Majority Voting system in the Council, though far short of a majority; and as membership negotiations are likely to take 10 years at least, that system will probably have been changed to the Double Majority method proposed in the draft *Constitutional Treaty*.

Secondly, the main difficulty from the Turkish viewpoint will be incorporating the mass of existing EU legislation into their own laws and applying them, as well as educating their public to understand the philosophy on which they are based. 

“...A common foreign policy will not be effective if it depends on negotiation amongst the member states for its genesis.”
