

'A ceremony under the gaze of papal statues' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (30 October 2004)

Caption: On 30 October 2004, the day after the signing, in Rome, of the European Constitutional Treaty, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung is less than enthusiastic as it describes the official ceremony.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 30.10.2004, Nr. 254. Frankfurt a.M. "Zeremonie unter Papststatuen", auteur:Fischer, Hans-Joachim , p. 2.

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A ceremony under the gaze of papal statues

Looking back and looking forward in Rome/By Heinz-Joachim Fischer

Rome, 29 October 2004. There tends to be something rather ponderous about Treaty signing ceremonies. But there was none of that this Friday in Rome. The host, Italian President Silvio Berlusconi, brought real verve to the proceedings, as he strode across the Capitol Square towards his guests with a beaming smile, greeting them effusively like old friends, taking time out for a photo opportunity in front of the equestrian statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius and generally looking at everyone with untiring friendliness.

Chancellor Schröder did his best to take Berlusconi off cloud nine; but there was nothing doing. That a ray of light might brighten the German Foreign Minister's features was never on the cards. And so they all walk together leftwards across the square, braving the stony-grim gaze of the Roman she-wolf, then climb the red-carpeted steps up to the main hall of the Council building, the Senators' Palace, where Rome's city council usually holds its sessions.

This is where the speeches happen. As everyone files in — and this takes some time — the scene is surveyed by the statue of Julius Caesar, the Roman Republican whose name came to designate the highest monarch. The first address came from the mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, whom Schröder, making amends, greeted particularly warmly, no doubt because Veltroni is a rising star on the Italian left. He is followed by Berlusconi, by the Dutch EU Council President, Jan Peter Balkenende, by Bertie Ahern of Ireland, by Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament, and by Italy's Romano Prodi and Portugal's José Manuel Barroso, respectively the current and incoming Presidents of the European Commission.

Berlusconi affirms Italy's determination to become the first country to ratify the Constitution through parliament, in recognition of the 'marvellous reality' of a united Europe of 450 million souls. His Cabinet would be approving the corresponding draft law that very day. Barroso spoke in French out of courtesy, Balkenende spoke Dutch. German was only heard from the interpreters.

And when Konrad Adenauer's name was pronounced. For nearly all the speakers harked back to that day in 1957 — 25 March to be precise — when the Heads of Government and the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the founding States, met in Rome to sign the Treaties creating the European Economic Community (EEC). Things now got positively exciting as the 'Presidents' spoke of how a Community had been created at that time because the countries of Europe had waged war on each other. Today the gentlemen and one or two ladies sit together in rapt attention. Chattering away and in the very best of moods, they move out on to the steps. This would have been the right moment to wave graciously at the cheering European populace. There was however no populace in sight in view of the strict security measures, despite Berlusconi's affirmation that the Constitution must now prove itself in a 'daily process of decision' by the people.

The ceremony itself is enacted in the 'Sala degli Orazi e Curazi' (named after a painting of a battle scene from ancient Roman history), the selfsame banqueting hall in which just half a century ago the founding Treaties were signed and where now the 'Rome Constitution' was to be raised from the baptismal font. If that particular image is still in order, for according to the preamble to the Constitution Europe does not look back on 'Christian roots' but rather on a 'cultural, religious and humanistic heritage'. That at least is what the fathers of the Constitutional Treaty have decided.

However, in the hall stand two splendid baroque statues, one of pope Urban VIII (by Bernini), the other depicting Pope Innocent X (by Algardi). The Heads of State or Government thus found themselves having, with an escort, to stride up to Innocent X and, under his stern gaze, sign the document with pens offered by the Dutch Council Presidency. The President of the Constitutional Convention, France's Giscard d'Estaing, under whose leadership the text had emerged from a year's hard struggle, looked on severely and impenetrably through to the end. Then they all went off in beautiful cars to the Quirinal Palace to be greeted by the Italian President, Carlo Ciampi, and enjoy a state banquet.