

Address given by Romano Prodi at the ceremony held to mark the signing of the Constitutional Treaty (Rome, 29 October 2004)

Caption: On 29 October 2004, at the official ceremony held in Rome to mark the signing of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, delivers an address in which he welcomes, in particular, the political and institutional advances enshrined in the Treaty which will benefit the operation of the European Union.

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On 25 March 1957, in this very room, Europe responded to the aftermath of the World War and the continuing Cold War with an unprecedented plan for the building of supranational democracy. Today, Europe is reaffirming the unique nature of its political organisation in order to respond to the challenges of globalisation, and to promote its values and play its rightful role on the international stage.

The new Constitution does not confine itself to consolidating the political and institutional system set up by the Treaty of Rome. It contains innovations that will make the Union more democratic, more effective and more transparent.

The Union will be more democratic. Most European legislation will be adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and, for the first time ever in a supranational structure, ordinary citizens will be able to make a direct contribution to the framing of European laws.

The Union will become more effective. More decisions will be taken by majority vote, even if this change does not go as far as many had hoped. The double majority system will reflect the twofold legitimacy of the Union, which is a union of peoples and of States.

The Union will also become more transparent thanks to the new mechanisms introduced to facilitate participatory democracy.

At the same time the Union's legislative process has been given greater legitimacy, thanks to the clearer demarcation of legislative powers between the Union and the Member States, and the fact that national parliaments will ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is upheld.

In the last few months there has been a fierce debate on how far the European Constitution actually goes. While respecting all the opinions voiced, I would like to stress that in every field the new Constitution makes great strides forward by comparison with the existing Treaties. It is the fruit of the work of the European Convention, which adopted new, more transparent and democratic working methods.

But the signing of the European Constitution does not mean that we have crossed the finishing line. In the months ahead Governments and citizens of the Union's 25 Member States will have much to do to persuade their parliaments or their fellow-citizens to ratify the new Constitutional Treaty.

While a great responsibility for ratifying the Constitution will lie with the Governments, the European Institutions will have to play their part in providing the citizens of Europe with objective and comprehensive information concerning its content. National political groups will need to express their views on the Constitutional Treaty, but it will be up to the Governments to act in such a way that parliamentary debates and referendum campaigns remain focused on the subject-matter of the Constitution itself, and do not become overshadowed by questions of national politics.

In signing the European Constitution here today the Heads of State and Government will be performing a bold and constructive act. The consequences of that act will be far-reaching. They will be far-reaching because the European Union, underpinned by the Constitution, will become the driving force for the economic and social well-being of its peoples and world peace.

This was the hope of the fathers of Europe when they gathered here on 25 March 1957; it is a hope of which we are all fully aware as we gather here today, on 29 October 2004.