

## Address given by Josep Borrell Fontelles 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, Josep Borrell Fontelles, President of the European Parliament, delivers an address in which he places particular emphasis on the role played by Parliament in drawing up the Treaty.

**Source:** Josep Borrell : Speech - Signing of the Constitution. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: European Parliament, [03.05.2005].

Available on <http://www.europarl.eu.int/president/defaulten.htm?home>.

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[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address\\_given\\_by\\_josep\\_borrell\\_fontelles\\_at\\_the\\_ceremony\\_held\\_to\\_mark\\_the\\_signing\\_of\\_the\\_constitutional\\_treaty\\_rome\\_29\\_october\\_2004-en-12f734db-c3cd-4069-a873-57d946d618b5.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_josep_borrell_fontelles_at_the_ceremony_held_to_mark_the_signing_of_the_constitutional_treaty_rome_29_october_2004-en-12f734db-c3cd-4069-a873-57d946d618b5.html)

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Here we are again: Europeans in Rome.

There are more of us, and we are freer and more prosperous than we were when we began our journey together here.

We are back in Rome having written a success story, a story of the reunification of our continent, peace between our nations, economic integration, and solidarity with the least-developed regions and countries.

Several treaties have marked out our route from Rome to Rome. They each provided a stone to pave our way, but there were no plans: 'the path is made by walking'. Each treaty had an economic focus: Rome, with the Customs Union and trade; the Single Act, with the internal market; Maastricht, with the euro.

Today, our governments are to sign yet another treaty, but this one is not like the others: the way it was drafted, its content and its symbolism set this Treaty apart.

By establishing a Constitution for Europe, we are acknowledging the virtual existence of a 'European Society', the citizens of which make their voices heard in a political Europe that champions the values upon which its Union is based.

It is not a new idea, but the European Parliament was the first to ignite the spark and keep it burning.

In his resolution adopted by Parliament in 1984, Altiero Spinelli had already sowed the political and conceptual seeds of this idea.

Four years ago, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for a Constitution for Europe, outlining what it should contain and proposing that a Convention be convened to draft it.

Within the Convention, for the first time in the history of the European Union, representatives of national parliaments, the European Parliament, the Commission and the governments of the Member States - 105 people from 25 countries - publicly debated the draft and drew up a text that, in the end, was amended and accepted by the European Council.

In contrast to previous Intergovernmental Conferences, the Convention's debates were characterised by total transparency and interaction with representatives of civil society, who were able to participate fully in the proceedings.

Whatever its shortcomings, this draft is another step along the path towards the creation of a political community.

Much of what the draft contains was conceived by the European Parliament, which, in democratic terms, has matured yet further as a result.

The European Parliament is now taking its place as a true co-legislator thanks to an increase in the scope of codecision to cover areas such as justice and home affairs, which have been given a significant boost in an effort to combat terrorism and cross-border crime.

The European Parliament's agreement will be required to adopt the multiannual financial framework shaping the Union's spending, to decide on the Members of the Commission, and to extend the responsibilities of the future European Prosecutor.

To address the difficulties caused by the need for unanimity in the Council, procedures have been set up to allow decisions to be made on the basis of qualified majority voting in codecision with Parliament. Member

States wishing to forge ahead with the process of European integration may do so through the EU institutions.

The democratic nature of the Union has also been significantly strengthened. The Constitution includes a right of citizens' initiative, and transparency - something the European Parliament has fought for from the outset - will be increased: debates and votes on legislation in the Council of Ministers will now take place in public.

The Union is now to be based on a dual legitimacy - that of the Member States, represented by the Council; and that of the citizens, represented by the Parliament - and on a double-majority decision-making procedure designed by the Convention and accepted - without substantial changes - by the Council.

By incorporating the Charter of Fundamental Rights - for which Parliament worked so hard - the Constitution has its own 'Bill of Rights', the most extensive and up-to-date of its kind in the world today.

I do not want to conceal the fact that Parliament had hoped for more progress to be made, particularly as regards widening the scope of qualified majority voting, for example to cover the social sphere and certain areas in the field of taxation. Parliament had also hoped for simpler constitutional reform.

That being said, the Constitution's achievements far outweigh the elements that remain unchanged. The aims of the Union are reaffirmed and it is defined as a social market economy in pursuit of full employment. It will be more democratic and more effective, and as a result will be able to place more emphasis on social issues than it could under the treaties leading up to Nice.

The Union has not reached the end of its political journey with the signing of this Constitution. We have actually come to the end of a long and exhausting process of partial reform that has been dragging interminably on since Maastricht. We are now at the beginning of a process in which every citizen of every Member State can take part.

The word 'Constitution' thus carries political and symbolic weight. We should stand by our choice of this word, as we Europeans know how significant it is. In the past, the word 'Constitution' has been a point of departure when dictatorships have fallen. It has helped to bring a new dawn of democracy to Poland, to France, and to my own country, Spain, not so very long ago.

The European Parliament fought for this, and that is why ratification of the Constitution by the people - however this takes place - is so important. The governments signing this Treaty today do not have the last word on it: that lies with the people, who will be called upon to ratify the Treaty through their Parliaments or via referenda.

Let us do what is necessary to win the trust of our citizens. Let's tell them about the challenges we face. Let's talk about Europe, about its identity, about its values, about what it is and about its *raison d'être*.

Let us explain to them that the future shape of this Treaty is in their hands, because this way, our Europe will be able to tackle the challenges of the third millennium more effectively than any of their countries could acting alone.

Let us try to explain and motivate in order to overcome the two main enemies of our democracy: ignorance and apathy.

Europeans can rest assured that for its part, their Parliament will embrace its responsibility for this issue, which is of key importance for our future.