

Interview with Jean Asselborn on the referendum on the European Constitution (10 November 2004)

Caption: On 10 November 2004, in an interview for the Luxembourg socio-cultural radio station 100.7, Jean Asselborn, Luxembourg Foreign Minister, outlines the procedure for the referendum to be held in summer 2005 in Luxembourg on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

Source: Interview avec le ministre des Affaires étrangères Jean Asselborn au sujet du référendum sur la Constitution européenne. [EN LIGNE]. [Luxembourg]: Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg-Service Information et Presse, [09.06.2005]. Disponible sur http://www.gouvernement.lu/salle_presse/Interviews/20041110asselborn_100komma7/index.html.

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Interview with Luxembourg's Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, on the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty (*Radio 100.7 on 10 November 2004*)

Radio 100.7: *For some time now, the political parties in Luxembourg have been arguing over the date for holding the referendum on the European Constitution. This morning the Conference of Presidents in the Chamber of Deputies and the Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, managed to reach an agreement. We shall be talking about this to Jean Asselborn, who is on the line now. Good afternoon, Mr Asselborn.*

Jean Asselborn: Good afternoon.

What were the decisions taken this morning by the Chamber Committee? Did you manage to find a date?

Let me first make it clear that we weren't just talking about a date. In my opinion, it was a very good meeting, where we put forward the Government's position, suggesting a possible way forward, and there was plenty of support from the Chamber. And we reached agreement on almost every point. At all events, we are all agreed that the referendum will be held on 10 July 2005. There was some discussion about this here in Luxembourg as we couldn't combine it with our Presidency on the one hand — it's just not possible in practice — but nor did we want to hold it at the same time as the local elections. So that only leaves one slot between 30 June and 15 July when there's nothing happening in Luxembourg on that front. And so we agreed on 10 July.

And what about the procedure? The European Constitution has to be established in Luxembourgish law, and, before a referendum can even be held, a special bill has to be passed. Did you come to an agreement this morning about the timetable?

We're working on it now. And, obviously, we have to make sure that we have general agreement. We have to base this special law on the special law which Mr Paul-Henri Meyers and the Committee on Institutions are very busy planning and working on right now. Accordingly, we can assume that, in January, or at the latest in February, the general law concerning the referendum, based on Article 51 of our Constitution, and also the special law would be in place. And then we shall look at the procedure for holding an initial vote on the text of the European Constitution in June, if the Chamber is in agreement, in other words the law that will approve the European Constitution.

After the initial vote, if the Chamber goes ahead as it said it would this morning, then a resolution would be agreed, saying that, OK, we've had an initial vote, and there will be a referendum on that specific point, so we'll pass a resolution saying that we will approve the decision of the voters, of those who've voted and taken part in the referendum and shown their position, in other words that the result of the referendum will be approved.

And so we'll be rid of the whole debate about whether the referendum is consultative or binding. This is perfectly possible in law, since the referendum will be a vote not about a law but about a position, about an initial vote that the Chamber will have to take on the new European Constitution. So it's perfectly possible to follow this route.

We were all agreed on this point with only one exception. At all events, it's a matter of what the debate is really about. And I think that, in addition to the Luxembourgish citizens here in Luxembourg, there are also people who are in favour and who take part in our public life and have the right to vote in elections for the European Parliament and have therefore registered themselves for this purpose. Such people should, therefore, also have the right to express their opinion in this referendum.

At which point would you consider the referendum to be a success?

The referendum will be a success if the new European Constitution is accepted here in Luxembourg.

But with what percentage?

I'd be happy to see it accepted with anything over 50 %. And we must all work towards this. And when I say we, then I mean the Government and the Chamber of Deputies which will, of course, fulfil its duty to organise an awareness campaign, as the Chamber thinks fit, with party involvement of course, and the Government will also have to take on its responsibility and make sure that a media campaign is launched to give people accurate and objective information, so that what is in the Constitutional Treaty ... Here, politicians will be under pressure. It won't be a walkover. It's easier to say 'No' to the European Constitutional Treaty than to say 'Yes' to that Constitution. The arguments for saying 'No' are always easy to find, but if we're going to argue for a 'Yes' vote, we shall have to make clear what's at stake, in this case the future of Luxembourg in the European Union and how Luxembourg positions itself in future as a country that is held in respect throughout the world because of its integrated position within Europe, and whether we are to keep that position for the next 50 years, as we have done in the past, or not.

That was the Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn talking about this morning's decisions taken by the Conference of Presidents.