

‘Transparency in the European Council of Ministers’ from Le Monde (29 November 2005)

Caption: In the 29 November 2005 edition of the French daily newspaper Le Monde, the seven Chairmen of the political groups in the European Parliament call for more transparency in the decision-making process of the Council of the European Union. They also emphasise the provisions laid down by the Constitutional Treaty on this subject.

Source: Le Monde. 29.11.2005. Paris. "Transparence au Conseil des ministres européen", auteur: Bonde, Jens-Peter; Cohn-Bendit, Daniel; Frassoni, Monica; Crowley, Brian; Pöttering, Hans-Gert; Schulz, Martin; Watson, Graham; Wurtz, Francis, p. 27.

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Transparency in the European Council of Ministers

Europe has never been as badly understood or as negatively perceived as it is now. In this situation, the importance of making the legislative activities of the Council of Ministers more transparent and open must not be underestimated.

We, the undersigned chairmen of all the political groups in the European Parliament, are particularly aware that many citizens throughout Europe have lost confidence in the European Union and its institutions, as the votes on the Constitution in France and the Netherlands showed.

The European Parliament debates and votes in public. The other arm of Europe's legislative authority, the Council of Ministers (in which the Ministers of the 25 Member States meet almost every week in order to adopt new legislation), continues to meet in secret. The Council's working parties have negotiated a number of laws behind closed doors, and they were then simply rubber-stamped by the Ministers.

It is the least transparent organisation in the European structure, and the Ministers are consequently not really held accountable either to their own Parliament or to the general public.

The public have the right to know how their Ministers vote and what arguments lead them to take certain decisions or allow them to accept certain compromises.

This is why we are calling on the current UK Presidency to enter this subject on its agenda.

On 29 October 2004, all the Member State governments signed the Constitution which includes the following points in Article I-50, entitled 'Transparency of the proceedings of Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies':

'1. In order to promote good governance and ensure the participation of civil society, the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies shall conduct their work as openly as possible.

2. The European Parliament shall meet in public, as shall the Council when considering and voting on a draft legislative act.'

This provision could be introduced at any time by a simple change to the Council's Rules of Procedure — something that would clearly change the atmosphere in which we legislate and would let the public see that the European Union is a joint project in which all the Member States are actively involved, rather than a remote European bureaucracy imposing arbitrary laws on a trusting public.

Jens-Peter Bonde, Chairman of the Independence/Democracy Group.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Monica Frassoni, Chairmen of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

Brian Crowley, Chairman of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group.

Hans-Gert Poettering, Chairman of the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats.

Martin Schulz, Chairman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

Graham Watson, Chairman of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Francis Wurtz, Chairman of the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left.