



PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY M. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,
FOLLOWING THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (EXCERPTS)

(Brussels, 18 June 2004)

THE PRESIDENT Ladies and gentlemen, better late than never! We've thus reached the end of the negotiations on the European Constitution. I believe we can say, without exaggerating, that it's an important day for Europe because, thanks to the new Treaty which has been adopted, we'll have a more efficient Europe, one which will meet our citizens' needs more satisfactorily and carry more weight in the world. These were clearly our objectives.

(...)

We must remember (...) that before our meeting began, we were already in agreement on a very large part, roughly 90% of the text of the Treaty. And what had to be done, yesterday like today, was to finalize the negotiation. This is always, of course, what's toughest and most delicate since the most controversial decisions are left to the end.

FINAL DRAFT CONSTITUTION/CONTENT

I welcome this agreement because it's fully in line with the text drawn up by the Presidency. And I believe we can say it's a good agreement for Europe and a good agreement for France. Firstly, because this text is going to enable Europe to function better. I'm thinking, of course, of the appointment of a stable European Council president, and a foreign minister who will enable us to have greater consistency in Europe's external action. There's also the reform of the Commission which, from 2014, will be smaller and so, I think, more in line with the Commission's proper remit, and more efficient. Finally, the adoption of the Council's new voting rules with the double majority 55/65 system which meets the objectives of having both a greater decision-making capacity and also being more democratic. By this I mean it takes greater account of the actual breakdown of Europe's population. It's a Europe of States, a federation of States and also the Europe of peoples with what this implies population-wise.

Secondly, we'll have a more democratic Europe. The distribution of powers between the EU and its member States is at last clarified. Co-decision between the European Council and Parliament becomes the general rule not only for legislative but also budgetary matters. National Parliaments see their role fully recognized in the EU's operation, and markedly increased, particularly as regards monitoring the subsidiarity principle. As you know, we were committed to this.

Finally, this Europe will allow us to press on, act and make decisions. We've made very considerable progress on extending qualified majority voting. I'm



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thinking particularly about justice and home affairs. Admittedly we'd have liked to go further, particularly on tax and social issues. But what matters is to have planned and bolstered the enhanced cooperation procedure which will allow States wanting to go faster and further to do so without being blocked by those who need more time. (...)

We have also decided on provisions more effectively protecting Europeans and their interests. I'm thinking in particular of the establishment of the future European public prosecution service on the basis of Eurojust and on the major advances recorded on defence. So, all in all, it's a very satisfactory result, I repeat again, obtained largely thanks to the efficiency and skill of the Irish presidency. This result is going to give Europe the necessary judicial framework to go on serving its citizens and strengthening its place in the world.

COMMISSION PRESIDENT

Last point, the Irish presidency has decided, given the time necessarily devoted to this reform, to postpone for a few days the appointment of the Commission President. (...) I know that, because of this postponement, Prime Minister Verhofstadt, has decided not to remain willing to be considered for the post and I think it's a pity.

(...)

EUROPE/WORLD

Q. With this Constitution, what weight is Europe going to have in the world? A year after the fault line which opened up in Europe as a result of the Iraq issue, has Europe today got the means to have a common foreign policy and does this Constitution really help it?

THE PRESIDENT You know Europe's aim isn't to get all its component peoples instantaneously to walk in step. Nevertheless, quite clearly there is a common motivation and the step taken today with the decisions taken on the foreign policy front and, in particular, that to establish a Foreign Minister, allows us to hope for more coherence in the decisions and consequently greater weight and strength in the world. This process will not happen overnight, but is desired and (...) we've made a good start.

CONSTITUTION/REFERENDUM

Q. (...) Now that the text has been agreed, are you or aren't you going to put it to a referendum in France?

THE PRESIDENT (...) Whether it's by referendum or by Parliament, because of the various procedural stages ahead of us, the European Constitution can't be ratified at the earliest for a year. (...) I shall take my decision in due course. (...)



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COMMISSION PRESIDENT

Q. Who is your new favourite for President of the Commission?

THE PRESIDENT I haven't got one. I shall wait for there to be candidates. For the moment, there aren't any. I shall wait for there to be candidates and then, I imagine we'll meet and give an opinion on them.

(...)

HISTORIC DATE

Q. You've talked about an important day, a good agreement today. You haven't used the word "historic". Isn't it nevertheless (...) a fact that 18 June, an important day for many French [General de Gaulle's appeal of 18 June 1940], will remain a historic moment for Europe?

THE PRESIDENT I think we mustn't over-use superlatives. But I believe that for Europe, this 18 June and this agreement indisputably have a historic dimension. (...) When you look at Europe's history from the beginning, you notice that there aren't any other examples where peace and democracy have been (...) established in such a vast area for the benefit of such a large population and done so peacefully and not imposed by wars which are always solutions which don't last.

So it's true, if you take a cursory look at Europe's history, if you think about Europe's history since it began, then yes, you can say that today is a historic day. (...)

UK/UNANIMITY RULE

Q. The British wanted the unanimity rule to remain in the social sphere. So Social Europe will have to wait. Did you come away with the feeling that, at the end of the day, the French social model commands fairly minority support in Europe?

THE PRESIDENT First of all, we have always, for a long time, argued in favour of a social model which is not the uniquely French social model, but one shared by a number of other countries. Let me remind you that in 1996, I personally presented to the Council a Memorandum on a European Social Model. That was the first, the first presented by a head of State or government. Since then we have always tried both to protect it when it was attacked and to champion or take forward our European social model.

It's an attitude and a stance which are generally supported by most of our partners. It is true that Britain has a somewhat different vision from us on the social level, for essentially economic reasons which I can moreover understand, even though I don't approve of them, and which impels her to fear above all else any initiatives which might hamper her country's economic



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forces. This, among other things, is what drove Britain to refuse to move to qualified majority voting on social and tax matters, the two obviously being linked. So I regret this, but it [QMV] will come. On the other hand, I welcome the fact that we have managed to impose on Britain the enhanced cooperation system which will allow us to act without Britain but with others who want to go faster and further in this field. |