



Assemblée des Régions d'Europe
Assembly of European Regions
Versammlung der Regionen Europas
Asamblea de las Regiones de Europa
Assemblea delle Regioni d'Europa

Strong Regions for a Strong Europe!

Summary of the debate on the EU Constitution

Berlin, Representation of Baden-Württemberg, February 22nd, 2007

The Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs had invited several experts to discuss the EU Constitution in order to find a common position among the AER member regions on how to proceed with the Constitution. Invited guests were: Michael **Clauß** from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Klaus **Hänsch**, MEP and former President of the European Parliament as well as two academic experts: Gaetene **Ricard-Nihoul**, Secretary General of Notre Europe and Daniela **Schwarzer**, Research Group on Europe at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. The debate was moderated by Jan **Techau**, from the German Council on Foreign Affairs in Berlin.

President Illy, President of the Assembly of European Regions and the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia stressed that the EU has to be a model for integration and should orient itself alongside the criteria of Subsidiarity, diversity, and cohesion. He said that the EU constitution should be ratified.

**Präsident Illy in favor of
EU Constitution**

Michael **Clauß** presented the German position on the EU-Constitution and highlighted current difficulties during negotiation talks with member states. He said that the EU Constitution was the most important subject for the German EU Presidency. He underlined that the problems with the Constitution will not yet be solved at the end of the German Presidency. 22 member states wish to have only slight changes within the Constitution, whereas five aim at having a revised text.

**Constitution to be
discussed on March 8
and 25**

The Constitution will be debated on March 8th at the Spring Council of the Head of States and also on March 25th, 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty.

**European Parliament
sticks to Constitution**

Klaus **Hänsch**, MEP and former President of the European Parliament explained position and strategy on the Constitution of the European Parliament. The European Parliament favours the current text of the Constitution since it is the best institutional balance which can be achieved. The European Union cannot accept further enlargement on the current treaties. Klaus Hänsch stressed that the European Regions all have an interest in a ratification of the Constitution since it brings at least 13 advantages to the Regions, and said that in the forthcoming negotiations in view of a possible intergovernmental conference the substance of the Constitution must be retained. The name „Constitution“ could be changed, a referendum however should be avoided.

**13 advantages for
Regions in current EU
Constitution**

Discussion

**Consequences of
« No » to be highlighted
to citizen:**

Changes in the Constitution

- **Michèle Sabban**, Vice-President of the Region Ile de France, said that it was difficult for France for the first time not to participate at the meeting in Madrid.
- David **Kirk**, member of the County Council Hampshire, stressed that the United Kingdom does not have a written Constitution and said that public opinion within the UK towards the Constitution is further decreasing.
- Klaus **Hänsch** said that the aim of negotiations should be to have all 27 member states on board, but no compromises should be made with states that after negotiations then would not ratify the treaty. Consequences of a „no“ need to be clarified to citizens

Recommendations, Ideas, Actions

Ms Gaetene **Ricard-Nihoul**, Secretary General of Notre Europe asked what could be done to have a greater identification of citizens with Europe and asked why another Convent was not considered in the AER position paper. Daniela **Schwarzer**, Research Group Europa, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, said that there are many advantages in the current text for the regions. She stressed that it would be difficult to split part 1 and 2 since they were part of a package deal during negotiations. She thought to accompany the discussions with public debates would be a very good means, but warned that citizens nowadays do not want brochures, but are well-informed and needed political communication coming from political parties.

We need political leadership. Citizens must see what Europe can do for them.

Discussion and Scenarios

- Michèle **Sabban** stressed the politically complicated situation in France and was in favour of public debates in the regions.
- Klaus Hänsch said that in times of crises it was especially important to show political leadership.

A Europeanwide referendum would not be successful

Präsident Illy summarized possible scenarios:

- all 27 member states ratify the Constitution
- an intergovernmental conference ratifies the Treaty with an amendment
- Not all 27 states ratify the Constitution and we will have a status quo

The AER Presidium ratified two positions at the end of the debate to be found on the AER Homepage www.aer.eu :

- Strong Regions need a Strong Europe! Berlin Declaration of the Assembly of European Regions
- AER position on the Future of the Constitutional Treaty