

SLOVAKIA IS THE 7th MEMBER STATE TO RATIFY THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION

Slovakia became the seventh Member State to ratify the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe on 11th May. Margot Wallström, vice President of the European Commission welcomed the vote by the Slovak Parliament that took place a few hours after that of the Nationalrat, the Lower Chamber of the Austrian Parliament saying that this was “*one more step*” towards the adoption of the treaty. “*Both approvals today, that will be the first in a series of parliamentary ratifications in May and the fact that nearly one third of the Member States have finished the ratification process, bring the Union significantly closer to the application of the Constitution,*” she declared.

The vote, the position adopted by the political parties and public opinion

After just one day of debate 116 of the 147 members of the National Council, the only Chamber of Parliament, present on 11th May voted in favour of the ratification of the European Constitution versus 27 who were against and four who abstained.

Most of the political parties are in favour of the European text: three of the four parties in the government coalition – the Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU) led by the Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda, the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) and the New Citizen’s Alliance (ANO) – as well as the following opposition parties: Direction (SMER) led by Robert Fico and the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimir Meciar. Of the Constitution, the latter, who was long time a Eurosceptic, said that it was “*better to have rules than not to have any at all*”. “*We must admit that we were unable to impose all of Slovakia’s claims but the same thing happened for the 24 other countries,*” said Foreign Affairs Minister Edouard Kukan (SDKU). “*The final text of the treaty represents an intersection of all opinions and ideas of all the EU member countries – which is not perfect but good enough,*” he maintained. For his part the President of the Republic, Ivan Gašparovič (Movement for Democracy, HZD), declared that Slovakia could only “*approve and accept this treaty.*”

However the Christian Democrat Party (KDH), a government coalition member had said for a long time that it was against the text lamenting the lack of strong references to Europe’s Christian roots and fearing, with the adoption of this treaty the dissolution of national independence. The KDH leader and present president of Parliament, Pavol Hrusovsky,

declared that the Constitution “*lacked democracy, Christianity and sincerity.*” Ján Figel a former MP for this party and present European commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism said he was in favour of the Constitution that he sees as a consolidation of the Union after the historic enlargement of 1st May 2004. “*The Union needs to consolidate for its political development. This text is the result of rigorous negotiations between the 25 member states and as a consequence it must not be used as a means for public opinion to demonstrate its discontent,*” he stressed.

The Communist Party (KSS), nostalgic of the Soviet era, is against the Constitution.

According to the polls six Slovaks in ten are in favour of ratification of the European Constitution.

The ratification procedure

According to articles 7 and 86 of the Slovak Constitution, in order to be adopted, a treaty must rally in its favour the majority of three fifths of the 150 members of the National Council.

The Constitution does not prevent the organisation of a referendum to ratify an international treaty but the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister were against this procedure to ratify the European Constitution. The use of the referendum is obligatory only when Slovakia plans to enter an alliance with other States (articles 93 to 100 of its Constitution).

In Slovakia, a referendum can be convened on any major issue on the initiative of Parliament or of at least 300,000 citizens (article 95). The participation of half of the registered electorate is obligatory to validate the result of this popular consultation.

The Christian Democrat Party was at first in favour of a referendum on the European text but had to give up the idea due to a lack of support on the part of the other parties and an insufficient number of citizens.

On 16th and 17th May 2003 the Slovaks approved their country’s accession to the European Union by referendum (92.46% pour, 6.20% against; the participation rate rose to 52.15%).

With Slovakia’s vote that follows Lithuania’s (11th November), Hungary (20th December) Slovenia (1st February), Spain (20th February), Italy (6th April), Greece (19th April) and the Nationalrat in Austria (also 11th May), nearly one third of the European States have now ratified the European Constitution.

Corinne Deloy