

CYPRUS IS THE ELEVENTH MEMBER STATE TO RATIFY THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION

One month after Latvia's vote (June 2nd), Cyprus has become on June 30th the eleventh Member State following a special two day parliamentary session to ratify the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. Thirty MPs voted in favor of the text, 19 against it and one abstained. This ratification has been welcomed by the European Commission. "*The message by Cyprus is an important sign of its engagement in Europe and we welcome this strong and encouraging message*" declared one of the spokesperson for the European Commission, Jonathan Todd.

According to Article 169 of the Cyprus Constitution, the international treaties have to be approved by Parliament, through a simple a simple majority of members present and voting, with at least one third of MPs present. Article 50 of the Constitution gives the President of the Republic and the Vice President the right to veto laws adopted this way. International treaties concerning trade and economic cooperation have to be approved as well by the Council of Ministers. The Cyprus Constitution does not call for a referendum, however on April 24th 2004, the country organized a popular consultation for the reunification of the island proposed by the United Nations. Nevertheless out of the ten new Member States that joined Union European on May 1st 2004, Cyprus is only one to have put its European Union membership up to a referendum.

The main parliamentary group, the Worker's Progressive Party (AKEL), on May 18th called for a rejection of the European

Constitution which it qualified as being “a neo-liberal treaty, conservative and militaristic”. “The Worker’s Progressive Party envisions a different Europe based on the principals of peace, democracy, stability and solidarity” declared in Parliament the spokesperson of the group, Andros Kyprianou. However, the negative vote of the nineteen AKEL MP’s was not enough to reject the Constitution. The other political parties represented in Parliament, the Rally for Democracy (DISY), the Democratic Party (DIKO), the Social Democratic Party (KISOS), New Horizons (NEO), United Democrats (EDI), the Democratic Movement (ADIK) and the Green Party (KOP), are all favorable to the European Constitution. One Green Party MP (KOP), George Perdikis, abstained from voting to protest against the fact that the request made by his party to hold a popular consultation on the treaty had been ignored. *“I am sure that the ratification will be appreciated in Europe”* declared the President of the Republic, Tassos Papadopoulos (DIKO), following the vote which took place by a show of hands.

To this day, eleven Member States have ratified the European Constitution: Lithuania, (November 11th), Hungary (December 20th), Slovenia (February 1st), Spain (February 20th by referendum), Italy (April 6th), Greece (April 19th), Slovakia (May 11th), Austria (May 25th), Germany (May 27th), Latvia (June 2nd) and Cyprus (June 30th). The French rejected the text during a popular consultation which took place on May 29th, the Dutch also voted “no” during a referendum held on June 1st.

The ratification process of the European Constitution will continue beyond the initially planed date of November 2006. In his message praising the Cyprus vote, Jonathan Todd also restated that *“whatever follows the ratification process, the Commission is*

determined to use this period of reflection to stimulate a big debate in the member states, to listen to the concerns of our citizens and reflect more generally on the goals of the European Union”.

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Translated by Kevin Cassidy