

## Constitution to be adopted in Rome

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EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS – EU leaders meeting in Brussels last night (29 June) agreed that the European Constitution agreed upon on 18 June in Brussels should be officially adopted in Rome in November.

The European Parliament had called for the text to be adopted in Madrid as a tribute to the victims of the terrorist attacks on the city on 11 March this year.

After failing to get the text agreed on time during the Italian presidency at the end of last year, the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi pressed successfully for the text to be adopted in Rome in any instance.

Traditionally the treaties have been signed in the country that holds the presidency of the Council at the time it is agreed, in this case Ireland.

The Constitution, if ratified by all countries, will replace the original Treaty of Rome from 1957.

And it is this ratification that is now exercising the minds of governments.

### Meet the voters

During the meeting EU leaders had a brief discussion about ratification of the Constitution during a meeting in Brussels on Tuesday.

According to diplomatic sources the discussion focused on the negative effects of a drawn out process of ratification of the text.

With some member states considering holding a referendum this year, the process could last over a two and half year period.

Luxembourg leader Jean-Claude Juncker, whose country is to have a referendum, suggested that leaders have to discuss ratification procedures and how to arrange them.

It was suggested that referenda should take place within a certain timeframe.

A diplomat said that EU leaders could agree that referenda and ratification by national parliaments all take place within eight months or less.

"They want to draw the dates together".

They informally agreed that the incoming Dutch EU Presidency should take up the issue and that foreign ministers could discuss the matter next month.

### Selling the text

With some member states facing significant public opposition to their EU policies, there was also talk of a 'Committee of Wise Men' whose job would be to communicate the Constitution to the EU citizens.

The Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis proposed the high-level group be set up, headed by the former Greek PM Kostas Simitis, who would reflect on the ratification process and present arguments in favour of adopting the Constitution.

The group would consist of "personalities of the EU."

Several EU leaders expressed their support to the Greek initiative, according to Reuters.

But the Irish Europe Minister Dick Roche said that leaders themselves should sell the Constitution to voters: "I personally believe if (leaders) believe in the constitutional treaty, they have to get out there and explain it to the people".

Some names of people which could be part of this committee have already been floated.

Former Commission President Jacques Delors and former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, politicians who currently do not have official positions, are being seen as possible "personalities" in this proposed committee.

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