

PEOPLE'S NEWS

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The People's Movement campaigns against any measures that further develop the EU into a federal state and to defend and enhance popular sovereignty, democracy and social justice in Ireland.

ALMOST 90% OF EU MEMBER STATE CITIZENS UNAWARE OF CONTENTS OF EU CONSTITUTION

The challenge – 45% of Irish people have never heard of it!

A eurobarometer poll says that just eleven percent of EU citizens have heard of the Constitution and feel they know its contents. Thirty-three percent have never heard of the new EU charter. In individual member states the figures are higher – 50% of Britons, 45% of Irish and 39% of Portuguese are unaware of the document. There is also a high lack of knowledge about what is in the 460-article treaty agreed by EU governments last June.

Only 39% of citizens know that the Constitution does not foresee the creation of a direct European tax; meanwhile only 38% of respondents know that the president of the European Council will not be directly elected by citizens. Overall, 56% say they know very little about its contents. Sixty-seven per cent of citizens in Ireland and Cyprus meanwhile answered 'don't know' when asked about their attitudes towards the Constitution. The poll was carried out between October and November last year by TNS Opinion/EOS Gallup Europe and 24,786 citizens were surveyed.

Ireland not to take part in EU battle groups – or maybe not until after the referendum!



Ireland is not to take part in the European Union's battle groups for the moment. Defence minister Willie O'Dea ruled out participation for the foreseeable future because of major legal and constitutional difficulties, Ireland does not have the means to provide a battle group on its own but was hoping to participate with other nominally neutral countries such as Finland and Sweden or Austria and has consulted other neutral countries about its concerns over the EU battle groups issue.

Foreign Affairs Minister Dermot Ahern has paid a visit to Sweden and Finland to discuss defence issues including how to set up battle groups as a neutral country. The Irish government is likely to have problems with the idea as it has committed itself to a triple lock mechanism whereby Irish troops are only deployed in military situations if there is a UN mandate and both the Irish government and the Dáil gives the green light. According to a government official, Ireland is the only member state which has said that a UN mandate is a "pre-requisite".

The battle groups, some of which are to be ready this year, will contain 1,500 soldiers each and are to be mobilised within 10 days to trouble spots around the world. They will operate within a 6,000 km radius and will be equipped to stay in an area for up to four months. The ten-days proviso means it is unlikely

that there will be time to get a UN Security Council resolution passed. Mr Ahern, who according to the APA news agency is to visit neutral Austria as well in the near future, has said he wants lively exchanges about this and other issues which affect all four countries. He also suggested that there be more meetings both unofficially and officially and at the administrative level between the four member states. Ireland's own requirement for a UN mandate has gathered support in Austria with Green and Socialist politicians praising the idea. However, in Finland a group of civil servants has been tasked to table a proposal this spring to reform a law in the country which says that Finnish forces can only take part in a crisis management operation if the action has a mandate from the UN or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

There are also legal problems, as under a defence act of 1960 Irish troops cannot be sent abroad for training, while having foreign troops in the country may breach the Irish constitution which states that there may be only one army in the state. These developments are an embarrassment for the Irish government at the EU level as it had been a strong supporter and an originator of the original decision to set up battle groups. The EU's battle groups are supposed to be ready for action by 2007.

But watch out for changes after the referendum! Although Mr Ahern has acknowledged the difficulties, he has said that he has no doubt but that they can be surmounted and added that 'In principle, we're willing to participate in battle groups. We are happy to make the necessary changes'. Defence Minister O'Dea responded that they 'were not in disagreement' though 'there may be a difference of emphasis'

Key part of EU Constitution may be changed



Just as member states get down to the difficult task of persuading their citizens to vote for the Constitution, it has emerged that a central part of the document may be revised. In a bid to ease French fears about Turkish membership of the EU and the voting power it would wield due to its size, the European Commission president told *Le Figaro*, that the rules may be changed. 'If it is necessary to change the rules [for Turkish membership] we will do so, but that is not an issue today' said José Manuel Durão Barroso. He was referring to the voting system to be used to take decisions under the new Constitution. Member states eventually settled on a double majority system based on population and a number of member states. In order for a decision to be taken 55% of member states representing 65% of the total EU population will be needed.

By the time Turkey joins the EU (not before 2015) it is expected that its population will have outgrown Germany's – currently the biggest member state in the European Union. Commenting on Mr Barroso's interview his spokeswoman said 'when the time comes to change the constitution we will discuss it but the time has not come'. Member states in December agreed that EU talks with Turkey should be formally opened in October.

But in France, particularly, there are fears that the referendum on the Constitution planned for May or June may become entangled in the Turkey question – French voters are largely hostile to Turkey's EU membership. News that the part in the Constitution which determines the future balance of power in the Union may be changed is likely to fuel opposition campaigns against the document.

Polish translation errors to delay ratification

Translation mistakes in the Polish version of the EU Constitution could delay the whole ratification process well as indirectly influencing its outcome reports *EUObserver*. The Polish Foreign Ministry told journalists that it has identified over forty mistakes that are expected to take a further three to four months to correct. Opposition politicians have said the translation contains 'flagrant errors' making it impossible to implement the treaty. 'These are not just simple linguistic mistakes but passages containing (legal)

dispositions that differ from other linguistic versions', PAP news agency quoted Kazimierz Ujazdowski of the centre-right Law and Justice party as saying.



The government will apparently fail to submit the translated document to the parliamentarians in early February as planned, and so the date for a national vote on the Constitution is likely to be postponed too. Polish politicians have been arguing about when to hold a referendum for months, as it needs over a fifty percent turnout to be valid. While the ruling left-wing parties would like to see the poll this autumn along with the presidential elections which usually spark great emotions, the right-wing opposition has called for more time for citizens to learn about the document and vote on it later in 2006.

However, if the European referendum fails to attract enough Poles to participate in it, both houses of the Polish parliament must separately approve the Constitution by a two-thirds majority. And that, some commentators are suggesting, might prove difficult should more eurosceptic parties dominate the new parliament after the general elections later this year.

Election pushed back over Constitution fears

The Polish ruling Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) has pushed back an early election over fears that the centre-right opposition could block the Constitution if elected. SLD President Oleksy said, according to AFP, that 'the elections should be held at the end of the legal mandate to prevent the right, which is opposed to the European constitution, rejecting the Treaty'. It had been previously planned to hold the election in June this year but it is now more likely to come in the autumn.

Opinion polls currently give the centre-right opposition a clear lead of twenty-five percent. This is fourteen points more than the SLD. Poland is now expected to hold a referendum on the Constitution at the same time as the election, which the SLD said would guarantee the fifty percent turnout required for a referendum to be valid. The Constitution cannot be ratified earlier partly because of translation errors in the text.

Opposition unites across continent to fight Constitution



Opponents of the European constitution across the continent are joining forces to begin a pan-European No Campaign, marking the occasion with a letter in *The Times* and other European newspapers. The European No Campaign, bankrolled by British businesses, is run by a German, Thomas Rupp, from the heart of Europe's financial centre, the City of London. His office overlooking the monument to the fire of London, is shared with Britain's Vote No campaign, the best funded and most organised in Europe.

The aim is to pool expertise and tactics in the referendums to be held in eleven EU member states. The letter, signed by forty-two prominent campaigners from fourteen countries, including a cross-party selection of British MPs, demands that 'public funds are not misused to give "yes" campaigners an advantage'. It also insists that governments 'respect the fact that a national "no" vote means the proposed constitution must be rejected'.

The letter coincides with a €375,000 party hosted by the European Parliament in Strasbourg to promote the Constitution, including travel for one hundred journalists. The European No Campaign is an unlikely coalition of businesses, trade unionists, peace campaigners, democracy campaigners, socialists, conservatives and greens. UK businesses fear that the Constitution will enhance trade union power. French socialists worry that it is too free-market. The Danes are worried that it undermines democracy and the Dutch are worried about their national identity.

Opinion polls suggest that Britain, which will hold its referendum in March 2006, is the most likely to reject the constitution, followed by Poland, the Czech Republic and Denmark. But as opposition rises, even the Netherlands and France could reject it.

Decline in 'yes' vote for Constitution in France



The gap between a yes and a no vote is declining in France, recent polls have shown. Although there is still strong support in favour of the Constitution, it appears that the gap is closing. Supporters of the new treaty are getting concerned, according to French daily *Le Monde*. A poll by Ipsos in December produced 57 percent in favour of a 'yes' and 43 percent in favour of a 'no'. However, a poll by the same company in September produced a result of 64-36 in favour of the Constitution. Support is dropping particularly from the right, according to Ipsos.

However, *Le Monde* notes that not all polls show this trend. A poll by TNS-Sofres in November put the 'yes' vote at 68 percent and the 'no' vote at 32 percent. In September, the figures were 65 percent and 35 percent.

Meanwhile, President Jacques Chirac has said that his country will have a referendum on the European Constitution before the summer. 'I have decided that the European Constitution will be submitted to you by referendum before the summer', said Mr Chirac. 'You, the sovereign people, will be called on to choose your own destiny.'

The French president, who had previously suggested the referendum would be in the second half of 2005, said approving the Constitution would 'allow Europe to be more democratic, more determined and more powerful'. The likelihood of France saying yes to the new EU treaty were boosted last month when French Socialists voted in favour of the Constitution in an internal vote. But the French trade union confederation CGT has voted overwhelmingly to oppose the EU Constitution. CGT railway workers leader Didier Le Reste said that 'unsurprisingly, there is a majority in the CGT to reject the liberal policy directions, including at the European level'. The CGT decision follows a rejection of the Constitution last month by the French education union FSU which will also boost the French no vote in the June referendum.

However, President Chirac has expressed concern in the past that the issue may become entangled with the EU's decision to open membership negotiations with Turkey in October 2005. The French public is largely sceptical about Turkish EU membership.

Meanwhile the *Assemblée nationale* will begin a wide-ranging discussion on the new powers that would be invested in it under the new Constitution. Members of the French national assembly's legal and foreign affairs committees will also examine a law to revise the French constitution before the EU Constitution comes into place – not expected before 2007. The articles that reinforce the role of national MPs will be the focus of their discussions. Centre-right assembly member Pierre Lequiller said this constitutional reform is a chance to get rid of a 'misunderstood Europe'.

However, for others it is not necessary. Henri Emmanuëll, a socialist assembly member and an opponent of the EU Constitution, argues that Danes and Belgians already submit European questions to national parliaments and there is no need for constitutional reform. Former prime minister Edouard Balladur also argues that not enough power has been given to national parliaments. Under the European Constitution, if it is adopted, members of national parliaments will be able to give their opinion on annual legislative programmes before their adoption. Moreover, all legislative proposals sent to the European Parliament will also be sent to national parliaments. Under an early warning system, members of parliament will have six weeks to object if they think a law breaches the subsidiarity principle (the principle that the Union does not take action unless it is more effective than action taken at the national level).

Each national parliament has two votes, and at least one third are needed – currently that would be seventeen out of fifty – for the proposed law to be re-examined. If the law relates to justice and home affairs, a quarter of the votes would be needed. The European Commission can then decide to simply leave the law as it is, modify it or withdraw it – it must, however, ‘give reasons’ for whatever decision it takes.

‘Rapid reaction force’ to monitor Constitution debate



A ‘rapid reaction force’ has been set up by MEPs to try and ‘put the record straight’ if lies are told about the European Constitution. ‘Within three hours, or at least within the same day, we want to react to lies and distortions about the Constitution’, stated Jo Leinen, head of the European Parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee. Speaking to the *EUobserver*, Mr Leinen, a German Socialist MEP, said he and a group of MEPs had taken it upon themselves to be the watchdogs on utterances about the Constitution as nobody else is doing it. ‘Who is defending the

Constitution? No European government is doing it’, says Mr Leinen. Mr Leinen’s other companions in this exercise include the president of the European Parliament, Josep Borell, as well as the authors of the report endorsing the Constitution, Inigo Mendez de Vigo and Richard Corbett. To help the group of eight MEPs keep an eye on debate in twenty-five member states, European Parliament offices in the member states will ‘pick up’ any information they consider to be a lie and pass it back to the group.

Mr Leinen said that they ‘would not react to small and tiny comments on the Constitution’ but just substantial untruths. Citing some examples of lies, he said that during the debate in the run up to the Nice treaty referendum in Ireland there were claims that it would enable abortion. In such cases, a press release or a letter to the editor may be sent by the MEPs. However, the MEPs’ action does raise questions about the extent to which Constitution’s opponents may be corrected for giving an opinion on the document. Mr Leinen admits that there is a thin line between opinion and a lie and that things will have to be dealt with the ‘on a case by case basis’.

Danish MEP Jens-Peter Bonde, said it was ‘a splendid idea’ to try and ensure that the debate surrounding the Constitution is factual but criticised the fact that the MEPs involved are all strongly in favour of the charter. The European Commission also has a website which has a detailed rebuttal of stories that it says are untrue. These include stories that have appeared – mainly in the UK press – about such diverse things as pigs having to be given toys, the euro being responsible for impotency, and eggs having to carry details of the hens that laid them.

It’s that man again!



The former Brussels correspondent of German magazine *Stern*, Hans-Martin Tillack, has been awarded the 30,000 euro Leipzig ‘Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media’ for his reports on corruption and democratic deficits within the EU institutions. Mr Tillack was awarded the prize jointly with famous American journalist Seymour M. Hersh, reporter for *Financial Times Deutschland* in Afghanistan and founder of the ‘Free Press Initiative’, and Russian expert on Chechnya Anna Politkovskaya who was poisoned in an attempt to stop her from publishing critical reports.

Following his story on corruption in the EU statistical office, Eurostat, in March 2004 Belgian police arrested Mr Tillack for allegedly bribing officials. His office was searched while he was detained and interrogated without being allowed to contact anybody. The judicial battle between Mr Tillack and the EU authorities is still ongoing.

On 24 December, Mr Tillack appealed a decision by the EU Court of First Instance to allow the European Commission and EU anti-fraud office to seek access to the files that the Belgian police seized. The Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig is awarding the 'Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media' for the fifth time. The award honours journalists and media that take great risks, show personal commitment, courage and democratic convictions to protect and foster the freedom of the press. The prizes will be awarded at a ceremony on 28 April 2005 in Leipzig.

European Court could rule on British foreign policy

Professor Alan Dashwood, a British government adviser on EU affairs and the author of the Foreign Office's own draft Constitution, gave evidence to the European scrutiny committee recently. Professor Dashwood criticised the 'clumsy drafting' of parts of the Constitution and said that a legal loophole 'means that the issue could be raised in a court' if Britain's foreign policy actions are in contradiction to EU policy after it signs up to the Constitution.

Although some sections of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy have purposely been kept outside of the remit of the European Court of Justice, the so-called 'solidarity pact' (Article 1-16) has not. The solidarity pact states that 'member states will actively and unreservedly support the Union's common foreign and security policy in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity'. Professor Dashwood concluded that the role of the Court of Justice in this area is 'an issue which would have to be ultimately resolved by the Court of Justice'.

The Government and the 'Yes' campaign often claim that the EU Constitution is necessary because it brings clarity and will show where power in the EU actually lies. In fact, in many areas it would create legal confusion and greatly extend the power of the European Court as the final arbiter; the court tends to use its rulings as a means to promote further EU integration.

Dutch referendum in May or June

A referendum on the proposed EU Constitution was approved recently as the Dutch senate voted in favour of a bill allowing for the poll. Senators in the right-liberal VVD had raised constitutional concerns over the poll – the first national referendum ever in Dutch history – endangering a parliamentary majority in favour of having a referendum in the upper house. The referendum, which will be non-binding, is now expected to be held in May or June.

The Dutch cabinet will campaign vigorously in favour of the EU Constitution. But the Dutch state secretary of European Affairs has said that the 'no' campaign is 'not without chances'. Mr Nicolai said that the prospect of Turkish EU membership may well be exploited by the opponents of the EU Constitution. Opponents of the new EU charter include the opposition leftist Socialist Party and two small Protestant parties.

No referendum on Constitution in Belgium

The Belgian liberal prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt, has lost the political backing needed to have a referendum on the European Constitution, according to Belgian media reports. His social-liberal coalition partner, the Spirit party, has made a political u-turn and decided to drop its previous support for a referendum on the Constitution. It defended the change by saying it was concerned that the referendum would be hijacked by the far-right Vlaams Belang party campaigning against Turkish membership of the EU. The Chairman of the party said that nobody is speaking of the Constitution but only of eventual Turkish EU membership, according to *Le Soir*. Deprived of support from the Spirit party, Mr Verhofstadt no longer has a majority in the parliament which supports holding a referendum. The Belgian Socialist Party is also opposed to a referendum.

Slovenia's parliament says 'yes' to EU Constitution



Slovenia is the third country to have ratified the European Constitution, following an overwhelming vote of approval in its parliament (1 February). *EUObserver* reports that seventy-nine members in the 90-seat chamber voted in favour of the treaty. A two-thirds majority was required for the ratification. Slovenia has followed Lithuania and Hungary in ratifying the document, all by parliamentary vote rather than by referendum. Italy's lower house of parliament voted in favour of the treaty a week ago but the upper house still has to ratify it.

Bogdan Barovic of the Slovenian National Party urged lawmakers to reject the document and protest the hurried way it was being ratified. 'Instead of having a debate on the bill and then approving it, we are first approving it and later we are supposed to debate on it'. However, just like at the European level, in-depth knowledge of the text is an exception.

British referendum question published

The British government has published the question voters will be asked in the forthcoming referendum on the EU Constitution. The question on the ballot sheet will read: 'Should the United Kingdom approve the treaty establishing a Constitution for the European Union?'

The Conservative Party, which opposes the Constitution, said that the question appears straightforward but has warned that the Constitution will lead to a European superstate. They have said that if they win the election, a vote will be held by October. Vote No's Neil O'Brien said: 'Tony Blair promised a great campaign in which "battle would be joined"'. Now the Government is reduced to trying to sneak out the EU Constitution bill without even a press conference. The reality is that the government doesn't want to discuss the EU Constitution ahead of the election because they know it is extremely unpopular with voters and with business'.

An exact date for the poll has not yet been set, but in an interview in the *Financial Times*, UK prime minister Blair said that the referendum would be held 'some time in 2006 but when, I don't know'. Britain is due to hold an election early this spring – probably in May – and it will take over the presidency of the EU on 1 July this year, so the vote is almost certain to be after these two events. The timing could prove to be crucial and may influence the referendum date in Ireland. Britain is arguably the country most likely to vote against the Constitution, which needs to be ratified by all twenty-five member states to come into force.

'Yes' campaigners are hoping that the UK will vote last on the issue, with the text already ratified by all twenty-four other member states. This would increase the pressure on the UK to vote 'yes' and strengthen the argument that the UK would be isolated in the event of a 'no' vote. However, it looks as if Denmark, Poland and the Czech Republic may vote after the UK, nullifying this effect. Current opinion polls show that roughly two-thirds are against the treaty. However, people close to the debate say privately that the gap will narrow after the election (which Mr Blair is widely expected to win) when the government steps up its campaign.

Those arguing in favour of the Constitution include most Labour MPs, the Liberal Democrats and the Britain in Europe campaign. They argue that Britain will be isolated if it fails to ratify the treaty and that the UK may be forced to leave the EU. Those arguing against include the Conservative Party, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Green Party, the Scottish National Party and the No campaign.

External relations commissioner calls for EU seat in UN



The EU external relations commissioner has said that the Union should strive for a single seat in the UN Security Council. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, previously Austria's foreign minister, said that the United Nations system is very strongly based on nation-state thinking and that instead 'sovereignties' should be combined. She claimed that she was 'not making the case for a European superpower ... Europe is not in the act of building up a global empire. This commitment to multilateralism is a founding principle of EU foreign relations. Our goal is to strengthen

international security through concerted work within the framework of international organisations. Europe must speak with one voice in the Security Council'.

Her comments were rejected by Germany, which is itself seeking a seat in the Security Council. Joschka Fischer said the idea was 'unrealistic' but that Germany would agree to a single EU seat if France and the UK would give up their own seats. The UN Security Council has fifteen members. Of these, five are permanent veto-wielding members – the UK, France, China, Russia and the US. The other ten are elected by the General Assembly for two-year periods.

Is the charter of fundamental rights a genuine guarantor of rights?

Nobody would challenge or dispute the concept of a charter of fundamental rights; the charter of fifty-three articles in the draft EU Constitution encapsulates some agreeable sentiments. However, there are aspects of it which protrude inexorably, like a sore thumb, and have been conveniently overlooked in the rush to propagate this charter.

Article 11-8 on the protection of personal data states:

1. Everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her.
2. Such data must be processed fairly for specified purposes and on the basis of the consent of the person concerned or some other legitimate basis laid down by law.
Everyone has the right of access to data which has been collected concerning him or her, and the right to have it rectified.
3. Compliance with these rules shall be subject to control by an independent authority.

The third part of this article is very striking and illuminating; there is a clear implication here that this 'independent authority' can determine who is adhering to and contravening these rules. Given that the 'independent authority' in question could well be the European Court of Justice, one is justified in asking is it a neutral body, given its past record in adjudication. The ECJ is one of the six EU institutions and cannot be deemed 'independent' when considering the Union's interests.

An example in point is the case of Bernard Connolly before the ECJ in 1999. Connolly published a book entitled *The Rotten Heart of Europe* about the Commission's corruption for which he was summoned by the court and made to pay the cost of proceedings. During the trial, one of the advocates-general of the Court, Mr Colomer, stated to the effect that 'A criticism of the EU is akin to blasphemy'. Connolly was not meant to express his dissent against the Commission's activities and the ECJ could hardly be described as acting in a neutral fashion as an 'independent authority' in this instance when it determined on the side of the Commission.

Clearly, this article pertaining to the protection of personal data is not as benevolent as it appears at first glance. Consider, for example, the USA's abuse of such a right as part of passenger name record (PNR) retention. The data protection working party says that the amount of data being transferred 'goes well beyond what could be considered adequate, relevant and not excessive ... Access to the full set of PNR

data is excessive'. Furthermore, Tony Bunyan, *Statewatch* editor, comments 'It is quite clear from their report that the transfer of data should not be taking place'. So, if the personal data of people residing within the EU are not being respected by the US, this article carries little weight. Moreover, is it possible that authorities or EU institutions could deal in the same fashion with individuals within the union?

Mr Franco Frattini, the new commissioner for 'justice, freedom and security' said the Commission was committed to safeguarding 'the commitments' to data protection in the charter and the treaty and to 'cooperation with the agencies safeguarding these rights' – and asked the question 'What new balances will it be necessary to find between privacy and security?'

'Principle of availability' supersedes the 'notion of privacy'

The Hague programme adopted at the EU summit on 5 November 2004 says that from 1 January 2008 the 'principle of availability' – which simply means that if data is held then it can be shared between law enforcement agencies – will become the guiding light for access to personal data held by national law enforcement agencies in other EU member states.

Tony Bunyan, *Statewatch* editor, says 'When the Commission and the Council finally get around to "data protection" it will be tailored to ensure the smooth-running of the powers, practices, databases and "data exchanges" of security and law enforcement agencies not those of the individual. In the "times we are living in" will data protection become a meaningless concept?'

Ultimately, it is reasonable to suggest that the charter of fundamental rights is a charter on the Union's terms; it is not written in stone. Given that Article 11-52 states 'Limitations may be made only if they are necessary and genuinely meet objectives of general interest recognised by the Union' one must ask if the charter is more about the hand fitting the glove than the glove fitting the hand?

Brussels calls for more competition in European defence industry

Brussels is planning measures to boost the European defence industry – a strongly sensitive sector in many member states. Speaking at a conference on collective security in Brussels, industry commissioner Günter Verheugen said that the European Commission would take concrete steps to make the EU defence industry more competitive, arguing that it has been 'traditionally excluded from many benefits of European policies'. The Commission also wants to see more competition in the defence sector, drawing ideas about how to open up highly protected and fragmented national markets across Europe from a public consultation launched last autumn.

The plan is to introduce a set of measures in the first half of 2005, Commission spokesman Gregor Kreuzhuber told the *EUobserver*, adding that, while the details are still being worked out, 'their ultimate goal would be to remove some obstacles for trade and production within the EU military sector. No other country is spending on defence as much as the US, with 420 billion US dollars for 2005. At the same time, several American companies have merged over the years, so fewer of them produce in large amounts. The same needs to be done in Europe, if it wants to be more effective and competitive'.

Czech president calls on experts to check EU Constitution

Czech president Vaclav Klaus has asked for an expert opinion on whether the European Constitution is in line with the Czech constitution. In a letter to the Czech constitutional court, Mr Klaus questioned whether changes need to be made to the country's constitution in order to pave the way for the new European treaty, according to the CTK press agency. Mr Klaus also said that he was one hundred percent against approval of the European Constitution saying it limits the sovereignty of nation states. He said earlier that the debate about the document was being dominated by technical details interesting only for a

limited group of people, while the authors of the text had based it on completely inaccurate ideas, such as 'existing European identity', CTK reported.

Prague has still not decided about the method of the ratification process although a popular vote is commonly favoured by most politicians. The main opposition party – Civic Democrats (ODS), founded by President Klaus – suggested that they were preparing a bill paving the way for a referendum to be held by the end of this year. While a bill on the referendum could include a provision about a turnout quorum for the vote to be valid – a recent Eurobarometer poll showed that only nineteen percent of Czechs would participate in it. Along with the Civic Democrats, the Communists – the second strongest opposition party – also oppose the EU Constitution.