

The Barroso Drama: Reality for the EU Constitution

In importance for the Union's constitutional evolution, the October 2004 events at least equal the European Constitutional Convention, including the Intergovernmental Conference. This is the idea behind the following tens of pages in this issue of *EuConst* devoted to their analysis. Eight authors have been involved in putting together this story, seven of whom are young researchers from different countries in the Union. Their participation allowed many national aspects of the drama to be brought out in a way which otherwise would have been impossible.

Apart from the importance of the events for European constitutional evolution, what counts is their help towards understanding the Union. A full treatment of these events, which is beyond the scope of our journal, would make up a *tell-all* book about the Union's political and institutional structure for any interested reader even outside the Brussels mental perimeter. In fact, the following accounts already should add up to a useful introduction to EU institutional law and structure and to its constitutional potential and particulars, including strengths and weaknesses. Its force is to proceed not from the formalities but from live performance.

It is on purpose that most of the following pages are devoted to the member state domestic roots and ramifications of the Barroso drama. The relationships between the member state political systems and the Union's politics mostly remain underexposed. Candidacies for Commission membership are seen as arbitrary results of domestic politics and of no particular consequence to Europe. The mere story of Buttiglione's entry on the European scene suffices to dismiss such views. True, the professor's launch from Rome involved a full dose of Italian political circumstance and expediency. But the learned hot potato was not passed on to Europe for nothing and once landed there saw its full caloric value ably turned into political heat.

The full story includes political novelties, such as the Parliament's swinging political theatre and its subsequent proud and successful accomplishment of facing down the member states. It profiles remarkable failures also, including those of the EuroTories EPP-ED ambushed in the Liberties Committee by their own

fault, never seeming to know what hit them before it was too late.¹ There was the failure of the Dutch presidency, immobilised by its domestic political weakness from resolving the crisis.

There were beginnings of Union authority, manifesting when, in the face of the crisis, responsibility was actually seen to be taken. After a long mistaken course plotted on the member states, José Manuel Barroso was forced to swallow his pride and take his part of the responsibility before Parliament by withdrawing his proposed team ahead of the vote on 27 October. That was all he was allowed to contribute in terms of salvaging the situation. The Dutch presidency managed in one move to fail its role and to drop Barroso like a brick, so that a motley set of leaders on 29 October had to fill the leadership vacancy (as told in the contribution on the member states).

Then there are the more technical aspects, delicacies for the amateurs of European institutional law. They concern the development, as to letter and matter and the both interacting, of the Commission's investiture procedure. And there are readings in a political theory perspective, involving the great figures of responsibility and representation. And there is so much more that one cannot help but celebrate the genius of events causing all these things and many more to coalesce on that single magnificent spot of Rome's Capitol Hill, that one day of 29 October 2004, date of the signature of Europe's Constitution.

WTE



¹ One element of the series is taking longer to write than expected, the one on the drama's succession of events in the European Parliament and in the European political parties. It is to appear in the next issue of *EuConst*.