

DEFINING EUROPE AND ITS FUTURE - MARTENS ON THE GREAT DEBATE

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Setting out France's priorities for its presidency of the Union from July 1, President Jacques CHIRAC's speech to the German Bundestag proposed a European constitution, to be elaborated after the Nice Summit in December. A period of what Chirac called "major transition" should conclude with a Europe "stabilised in its borders and its institutions." The speech, a response to the ideas set out by German Foreign Minister Joschka FISCHER on May 12, "lifted a taboo", said Nicole FONTAINE, President of the European Parliament. She welcomed Chirac's vision of "the people regaining sovereignty through the European Parliament, but also through the national parliaments," and his insistence on "a clear division of competence between the different levels of the European system."

Here, EPP President Wilfried MARTENS addresses some of the big issues now being debated.

EPP News: Chirac appears to have gone much further down the European road than is the Gaullist tradition. The "Europe des patries" is no longer mentioned. Was this a surprise to you?

Martens: No. The mood in France has shifted considerably since the controversies over the Maastricht Treaty. I have the impression the Fischer speech has galvanised French thinking. So has François BAYROU (leader of the *Nouvelle UDF*), who is a convinced European, and is a potential challenger to Chirac in the French presidential elections in 2002. In France, 59% are now in favour of further integration. Bayrou this week proposed a radical constitution for a federal Europe (see below).

EPP News: Certain countries are put out by Chirac's phrasing - for instance the idea of the pioneer group "gathered around Germany and France." It sounds rather arrogant, as if the Franco-German axis were a political force of nature.

WM: That central relationship has to work if we are to advance at all. Take one simple-sounding example in the tangle of thorny problems we call "the leftovers of Amsterdam," the re-weighting of votes in the Council. Gerhard SCHRÖDER (German Chancellor) needs Chirac's support if the 80m people in Germany are to have more voting power than France, Britain, and Italy - all with populations of about 60m, but for the moment with the same voting strength as Germany. That issue connects with numerous others...If there is not a good working relationship between France and Germany, then nothing will move. You now have a more pragmatic relationship between the leaders than in the time of KOHL and MITTERRAND. But it is more than functional: the Chirac speech embraced many of the ideas put forward by Joschka Fischer.

EPP News: More important perhaps: the "pioneer group". Isn't there a danger of a two-speed Europe?

WM: To an extent we already have that, with only 12 out of 15 in the euro-zone, for instance, and free movement in 10 out of 15 (under the 1995 Schengen Agreement). It's inevitable, to an extent, that some will go faster than others, and as Chirac pointed out,

opting out of certain policies is provided for in the Treaty (on European Union). But I have several reservations. One is about the danger of institutionalising two speeds. Of making it permanent.

EPP News: Chirac said explicitly that he did not want any new treaty between these pioneer states, no treaty within the Treaty, no new dividing lines: "Our only aim is to preserve the ability for impetus."

WM: But he also talked of a "supple coordination mechanism", a separate secretariat for the pioneers. An inter-governmental Commission within the Commission is something we should oppose.

EPP News: Commission President PRODI denied that he saw this as a snub.

WM: All the same, it would unnecessarily complicate things, and risks undermining the Commission. The Commission is essential, the motor of European integration, the guarantor of the Treaty. Without it you don't have a European Union.

EPP News: What about President Chirac's proposal for a radical, once-and-for-all discussion of a constitution for Europe, including a definition of where Europe stops...?

WM: I have long argued for exactly this. We need to codify European political practice. Who is responsible for what? Subsidiarity is at the basis of our thinking, and of the European project. It needs to be given the force of law. We also need to decide on Europe's geographical limits, an issue which is especially sensitive in Germany.

EPP News: Chirac is rather vague about the shape or character of the Europe whose constitution should now be written. Isn't there a severe danger that this discussion will go on so long as to leave enlargement bogged down indefinitely? Chirac warns about a "fuite en avant". Euro-scepticism is growing among the candidate countries. There is palpable impatience, a constant demand for deadlines...A fuite en avant doesn't seem to be an imminent hazard.

WM: That is my second concern. We cannot, must not derail the enlargement process. The EU should be ready for new Member States from January 2003 - though, as [Michel BARNIER \(Commissioner for Regional Policy\)](#) pointed out at our summit in Porto, the applicant states also have to be ready. But I am generally optimistic about the pace of events. We should see a Charter of Fundamental Rights agreed by the time of Biarritz (half-way through the French presidency), and the IGC, if it is successful, will give the Union a new vitality and legitimacy. In other words, it will be clearer what kind of Europe the applicants are joining, and will be helping to build. These so-called "leftovers of Amsterdam" are rather fundamental, after all: how many Commissioners for each country; agreement on majority voting; reweighting. If those are resolved, then a constitution for Europe will not sound as difficult or ambitious as it does now, because the identity of the Union will have much clearer contours.

BAYROU SETS OUT REFORM PROPOSALS



UDF leader François Bayrou MEP (pictured left with Spanish Prime Minister AZNAR) has already presented a draft EU Constitution which the UDF is expected to

approve in October; it will be discussed at the EPP Congress in Berlin in January, 2001.

Key points are:

- election of a president of the EU for a five-year term, initially by a "European congress" of MEPs and an equal number of national MPs, then by direct election.
- transformation of the Commission into a European government
- a bicameral Parliament formed by the existing EP and a Council of States.
- the Union to deal only with matters "formally and clearly" conferred on it.

DEATH OF A GREAT EUROPEAN

Pierre PFLIMLIN, the last prime minister of the French Fourth Republic, and President of the European Parliament from 1984 - 87, died earlier this week aged 93.

A lifelong Christian Democrat, Pflimlin was a disciple of Robert SCHUMAN, and as passionate about Strasbourg as about Europe: he was instrumental in bringing the Council of Europe, the European Court of Justice, and the European Parliament to Strasbourg.

"He has left us too soon, just when the construction of Europe is going along the path he always called for," said President Chirac.

Pflimlin's 19 days as prime minister were among the most extraordinary of France's post-war history: he was elected on May 14, 1958, just after French settlers seized government headquarters in Algiers. The army in Algeria proclaimed the formation of a Committee of Public Safety and demanded de Gaulle's return to power - threatening to invade Paris if this did not happen. Pflimlin gave way to de Gaulle, and to the surprise of his friends served under him, resigning only in 1962 in protest at de Gaulle's refusal to embrace European integration.

