

A European Constitution by 2009

Wed, 11.10.2006

Chancellor Angela Merkel has spoken to José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, about the coming German presidency of the European Council.

One of the main items on the agenda for Germany's presidency would be the constitutional treaty. The Chancellor additionally called for a citizen-friendly Europe. She also referred to the celebrations to be held in Berlin to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

During its presidency, Germany wants to develop a timetable for an EU constitutional treaty. This was confirmed by the Chancellor after a meeting of the Federal Cabinet attended by the Commission President.

However, the drafting of the constitutional provisions could not be completed in the first half of 2007, before the end of the German presidency. "But we need the treaty before the next European elections, and we will be very ambitious in tackling this," the Chancellor emphasised.

Merkel for a "real" constitutional treaty

The Chancellor rejected suggestions that only part of the constitution be brought into effect. There had to be more than just a reform of the European institutions. "What has to be there at the end is something worthy of the name of constitutional treaty. It can't just be an institutional arrangement about how voting will happen in future," she insisted.

Closer to its citizens and less bureaucratic

Merkel also wants to fight for a Europe that is closer to its citizens. Over-regulation had to be dismantled, she demanded. Europe had to think more about jobs. Barroso too emphasised the importance of reducing bureaucracy: "We must reduce the burden of restrictions on businesses and citizens."

Berlin as symbol of a transformed Europe

Merkel announced that a special session of the European Council is planned for 25 March in Berlin. This will be the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome. As the venue for the anniversary celebrations, Berlin is the symbol of a transformed Europe that has overcome the Cold War.

25 March 2007 will also see a joint declaration by the European Parliament and Commission. The "Berlin Declaration" is intended to inspire hope in the future of Europe – a culturally diverse, social and economically strong Europe.

Barroso praised the Federal Government's plans. The "Berlin Declaration" could be the symbol of a new, united Europe.

The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 laid the foundations for European unity. The **Treaty of Rome**, signed in 1957, established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). This marked the birth of the European Union.

Cooperation between current and future presidencies

The start of the German presidency in January will be marked by close consultation with the states that will succeed Germany in the presidency. The Federal Government is thus working out a common agenda with the governments of Portugal and Slovenia. As an example of this far-reaching cooperation, Merkel cited the organisation of the EU-Africa Summit that is to take place during the Portuguese presidency in the second half of 2007.

Great expectations of the German presidency

Barroso referred to the great expectations of the German presidency: "But it isn't fair to put the whole burden on Germany's shoulders," he said. Six months was a limited period of time. He promised to support Germany to the best of his abilities during its presidency.