

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3568/03  
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to the Commission

Subject: Draft Constitution no solution to the EU's lack of democratic legitimacy

According to one view, the democratic deficit in the EU consists in the fact that more and more decisions are taken at EU level, while the people still identify with the national level of politics. Evidence of this is provided by the very low turnout for elections to the European Parliament, a pattern which does not look likely to be broken ahead of subsequent elections. According to this view, the core of the problem is that there quite simply is no European identity or a single European people. On the basis of this view, several countries (Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, the UK) have opposed the development of the EU towards a state (they prefer the EU to remain an organisation which cooperates to resolve practical issues). If the draft Constitution is adopted, a few more steps will have been taken towards a future state. However, according to the above view, such a development is a denial of democracy in the EU. As long as the democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament is low, any strengthening of its power entails a weakening of democracy and a corresponding weakening of the influence of the national parliaments via the Council of Ministers. This does not reduce but increases the distance between decision-makers at EU level and the electorate. It also defeats the object of establishing a constitution for the EU.

One example of the European Parliament's lack of democratic legitimacy at the present time is that, with very few exceptions, no EU citizen can state the name of any political group in Parliament, let alone what political tendency it represents. They are unknown to the great majority of the public. When people go to the polls in European Parliament elections, they look only at national issues. Moreover, Members of the European Parliament often have to follow a party political programme at EU level which frequently contradicts the parties' election manifestos at national level. The most serious aspect of the problem is that voters who voted for an MEP to represent them are not in a position to know whether they have been duped. At the present time, it is almost impossible for voters to know what is happening in EU politics. There is no media coverage etc. The entire situation is a vicious circle which ultimately creates contempt for politicians.

It is widely understood that the EU suffers from a lack of democratic legitimacy, as described above. In the light of that fact, how can the Commission endorse the draft of the new Constitution when, by proposing a strengthening of the European Parliament's powers, democracy in the EU is weakened? How does the Commission believe that strengthening the supranational level can win the support of the people when, de facto, the European people and the European identity required to legitimise its decisions do not exist?