

## **Slovenia is the third country that has ratified the European Constitution**

On February 1st Slovenia became the third State to ratify the European Constitution. The Državni Zbor, the lower Chamber of the Slovenian Parliament, approved the draft treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe by 79 votes in favour, four against and seven abstentions.

The European Union welcomed this ratification. *“With this massive vote Slovenia has given a strong sign to the other Member States about the advantages that the Constitution will bring,”* declared Margot Wallström, Vice President of the European Commission. Janez Jansa maintained (Slovenian Democrat Party, SDS) for his part, *“by voting in favour of the ratification you will enable the Constitution of the European Union to move forwards in terms of its application amongst EU25. Slovenia has assumed a great responsibility vis à vis the joint future of Europe.”*

In order to ratify the European Constitution the Alpine Republic had the choice between the referendum or parliamentary means. Article 170 of the Slovenian Constitution stipulates that proposals to revise the fundamental national Law must be submitted to referendum if a third of the representatives at the National Assembly ie 30 MP's request it. The Slovenian National Party (SNS) – that has six representatives- had demanded the organisation of a popular consultation whereas the other political parties in the National Assembly were against this. Since the Slovenians approved their country's membership of the European Union by 89.66% on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2003 the government deemed it unnecessary to call the electorate back to ballot and chose to ratify the Constitution by parliamentary means.

*“According to the magnitude of the “yes” vote to the referendum on the entry of Slovenia into the Union I find it sensible for the ratification of the European treaty to be undertaken by the National Assembly,”* declared the President of the Republic Janez Drnovsek.

In Slovenia there has been no public debate on the European Constitution. According to an opinion poll undertaken by the Faculty for Social Sciences in Ljubljana in January, half of Slovenians said they were in favour of their country's ratification of the European draft treaty (54%, versus 10% who said they were against and 36% who had no opinion). Moreover

according to the most recent Eurobarometer in October and November last one third of Slovenians maintained that they had not been informed about the European Constitution, 43% said they were “slightly informed” and 25% “well informed”.

According to article 170 of the Slovenian Constitution the vote in favour of two thirds of the 86 members of the National Assembly, ie 60 representatives was required for the text to be approved. After a four hour live televised debate which Slovenian EuroMP’s and some EU Member State Ambassadors were invited to attend, 74 MP’s voted in favour of the ratification of the text, four voted against and seven abstained. Five were absent at the time of the vote. Therefore Slovenia became the third State to ratify the European Constitution after Lithuania (11<sup>th</sup> November) and Hungary (20<sup>th</sup> December). *“This ratification is important not only because the Constitution enables a better organisation and an improved running of the Union but also because of the values confirmed by it. We are responsible of the respect and strengthening of the values that it assets, not only in our country but across the entire Union and even beyond since this is about assuming Europe’s responsibility in the future of humanity,”* stressed Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa.

Corinne Deloy