



A new president for a New Europe

by André Nilsen

Mr Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, prime minister of Portugal, has won approval from the other leaders in Europe to take over as President of the European Commission in November. He will become the chief executive of the European Union at the most dynamic period in its history. The widening accomplished through enlargement and the deepening that will follow from the constitu-

tion dwarf all previous episodes of expansion and integration.

On May 1, enlargement was completed as 10 new member states joined the 15 old ones to form a European Union of 25.

With Eastern and Western Europe coming together in a single political community, a final line has been drawn under the Cold War, fully

MAIN POINTS

Jose Barroso, the new president of the European Commission, takes the helm as the EU is transformed by enlargement and the constitution. To succeed, he has to fill three major roles: as an effective strategist, a skilled story-teller, and a tough statesman. The odds are good that he will perform well.

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erasing the last remaining shadows of the iron curtain. Although the Eastern European countries gained their freedom from oppression in 1989, they did not win the freedom to play a full part in governing their continent until now.

However, Europe has still not reached its final frontiers. Croatia has just been given the go-ahead to begin accession negotiations. The remaining former Yugoslavian countries will have to queue a bit longer. At the end of the line, Bulgaria and Romania are also destined to eventually join.

On June 18, a constitution was agreed that enhance both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the European Union.

On the one hand, the improved processes of governance will pave the way for swifter, smarter, and tougher policy responses to common opportunities and challenges. The new decisionmaking rules in the Council of Ministers will facilitate greater cooperation among the peoples and states of Europe.

The list of policy areas where a qualified majority rather than unanimity among the member states suffices to make decisions has grown considerably, thus limiting the number of policy areas where a

single country is able to stop progress. At the same time, the threshold for achieving a qualified majority in all these policy areas has been lowered, thus making it harder to build coalitions that can block new policy solutions.

On the other hand, the improved balance of power has opened the doors to greater democratic input to and control over policy-making. The strengthening of the European Parliament relative to the Council of Ministers will bring Europe closer to the citizens.

The number of policy areas that are subject to the co-decision procedure where the Parliament enjoys equal powers with the Council has been increased, which will make it harder for governments to make policies that are out of touch with what people want Europe to do.

Although the constitution has achieved a lot both in terms of effectiveness and legitimacy, it is just the beginning, not the end. Those who hope the constitution has halted the drive towards 'ever closer union' are likely to be disappointed.

Despite excited exclamations to the contrary, reports of the death of the Franco-German alliance are greatly exaggerated. The constitution in fact makes it much

easier for Paris and Berlin to form an inner core of countries that forges ahead in key policy areas.

If the past is any guide to the future, policy areas energized by enhanced co-operation are likely to attract ever more member states to join, until in the end only a few chronically euroskeptic countries remain on the outside to their own detriment.

The great momentum created by enlargement and the constitution is likely to lead to further widening and deepening in the years to come. Mr Barroso will be responsible for governing the New Europe through this unparalleled period of consolidation and renaissance, tension and reinvention, anticipation and fulfilment.

This will not be an easy task. The first challenge will be to define the role of the President of the European Commission in the New Europe. In fact, the President has not only one but three major roles to play.

First, he needs to be an effective strategist. The new President has to develop and implement a strategy that outlines how the Commission should manage the impact of enlargement and the constitution while exploiting the momentum

that has been generated to drive Europe forwards. Importantly, he should set out how Europe should take advantage of a multi-speed Europe built around a Franco-German core.

Second, he needs to be a skilled storyteller. The new President has to create and deliver a narrative that explains the benefits of the European Union in a tangible, practical, and concrete way to the peoples of Europe, countering the ignorance that feeds euroskeptic mythology. In particular, he should play a leading role in selling the constitution to the electorates in those member states that ratify through referenda.

Last, he needs to be a tough statesman. The new President has to make sure that the New Europe employs its economic, political, and military weight as a force for good in international affairs. More specifically, he should pursue a multipolar world order where the European Union is a servant of the United Nations, an equal to the United States, and a partner of China and Russia.

Only time will show whether Mr Barroso will manage to fill all these roles properly and make a success of the job. However, the odds are not too bad. His prime ministerial experience will have



taught him some useful lessons in strategy. His academic experience could come in handy when it comes to storytelling. And pulling off the feat of organizing a war summit in support of Bush without alienating Chirac is an excellent example of statecraft of the highest calibre. He might just be the man Europe needs.

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