



by Renato Ruggiero

EDITORIAL

“For centuries Europe has been an idea, holding out hope of peace and understanding. That hope has been fulfilled... European integration shows that we have learned the painful lessons of a history marked by bloody conflicts”. Those are the stirring opening words of the Berlin declaration approved by the 27 Heads of State and Government of the EU Member Nations and signed by the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Parliament. The words are not rhetorical; they express the wish for a realistic union of the past with the situation actually existing in Europe today. The choice of Berlin as the venue for the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome symbolises the enormous tragedies of the past and the current reality of peace, freedom and progress on the European stage. There is also an awareness that the motives underlying the European “adventure” seem to be increasingly fading from memory, with the result that they may no longer suffice to justify further moves toward political union. That’s why the German Chancellor Angela Merkel chose to recall that the Treaty of Rome was signed only 12 years after the end of the second European Civil War of the 20th century, and, remembering her own childhood in East Germany, pointed out proudly and forcefully that “today we live together in a way that was never possible in the past”.

Opinions on the Berlin Declaration have been many and varied. One could expect nothing else.

To judge the value of the document, we must start by recognising that – the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome apart – the declaration’s most urgent political intention was to end the long pause for thought that followed the two failed attempts by France and the Netherlands to ratify the plan for a Constitution. When work on formulating the text of the declaration began,

there seemed to be no guarantee that this political objective would be achieved, because it required all 27 Heads of State or Government to reach a consensus, or at least that none of them would voice any rigid opposition: conditions which appeared unlikely to be met. Yet the objective was reached thanks, in very large part, to the ability and determination of the Chancellor, Angela Merkel. In fact, the determining factor in assessing the result is that the date for achieving the institutional support necessary for the Union's new mission in a changing world has been set as 2009, before the European Parliamentary elections. This is indicated in the Declaration, even if the document does not specifically mention a "Constitution", but refers to "a renewed common basis".

The compromise was not easy to reach, but behind the scenes, the clear majority opinion is that it be considered necessary to open the way to an agreement which sacrifices appearances, in particular the word "Constitution", in order to safeguard the essence, i.e. all the most important principles of the constitutional concept. Minister D'Alema was the first to indicate that, in the forthcoming negotiations, the importance of the measures to be protected should take precedence over appearances.

_At the celebration in Berlin to mark the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Rome Treaties, Angela Merkel recalled that the treaties were signed only 12 years after the end of Europe's second civil war and that "we live together today in a way that was never possible in the past"



Certainly, dropping the term “Constitution” has made it easier to reach a consensus of by far the largest majority of the Union Members, as well as to ensure that opposition from the Czech Republic and Poland is not totally rigid – a good omen for the outcome of the negotiations which begin in June.

The task now is to set out the phases intended to lead, in the spring of 2009, to the implementation of the decisions to be taken in the next 15 months. There’s no doubt it will be difficult. But with the able guidance of Chancellor Merkel, the German presidency is the surest guarantee of defining the best possible “road map”. Chancellor Merkel is emphatic that the agreement must be signed by all the 27 Heads of State or Government. Certainly, the other EU Members share the same objective, but the price to be paid to the most reluctant cannot and must not exceed a ceiling that is acceptable to all the others. That’s why the idea of stronger cooperation, or at least of a core group to lead the way, remains on the table. Not only is it included in the draft Constitutional Treaty signed – but not ratified – by all the Heads of State or Government, it is, albeit in a different format, the reality of the current situation with the two great examples of the Schengen Agreement and the euro.

Two final thoughts. The first is the Declaration’s forceful evocation of major challenges “which do not stop at national borders”, emphasizing that a new advanced Europe is a necessity, not simply one of many political options but the only one that is strong enough to defend the “European model [that] combines economic success and social responsibility... The European Union is our response to these challenges”, because alone, no single member can meet the global challenges.

The second consideration is the confirmation that the EU’s policy of openness remains a fundamental component of the Union, together “with the will of its Member States to consolidate the Union’s internal development”. This repeats a theme that has been ever-present in the series of new member admissions. In other words, expanding and strengthening the Union must remain necessary and

simultaneous objectives: a commitment that becomes increasingly important as the Union continues to gather new members.

In conclusion, in evaluating the Berlin Declaration, one must maintain vision and determination along with a healthy realism that is *de rigueur* in any European negotiation. Certainly, Italy would have liked more, and we made our views known to the German presidency. We would have liked a commitment to be made to do away with the veto in community decisions, even if no precise date were fixed. We would have liked a commitment to include the resources needed to carry out the Union's policies in the Union's budget. Political realism and reasonable pressure from the German presidency, which feared that an agreement already taking shape might be returned to the debating chamber, counselled us to wait, at least for the time-being.

In the 50 years that have gone by, there has never been any lack of problems in creating Europe, nor any lack of serious crises. But on looking back, we see that sooner or later the problems and crises were overcome. Today it is harder to gain the consensus of all of the Union members because there are now 27 of us and we are living in a rapidly changing world which calls for quick decisions. Implementation in spring 2009 of all the most important principles contained in the current draft Constitution is the most important way of giving the Union the necessary means to participate in building a better world.

The Berlin Declaration concludes: "Europe is our common future". Without contradicting this objective which we all must share, it must still be possible to accept, as we do at present, different rates of progress where necessary. —