Parliament's opinion concerning the draft treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Richard CORBETT (PES, UK) and Inigo MÉNDEZ DE VIGO (EPP-ED, ES) on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The committee gave its backing to the Treaty, saying it "wholeheartedly supports its ratification". The report obtained the support of a large majority of committee members (20 votes to 3, with 3 abstentions) after the two co-rapporteurs drew up a number of compromise amendments incorporating many of the remarks contained in some 282 amendments tabled to their draft report.

The resolution as adopted by the committee concluded that: "the Constitution is, globally, a good compromise and a vast improvement on the existing treaties which will, once implemented, bring about visible benefits for citizens (and for the European Parliament and the national parliaments as their democratic representation), for the Member States (including their regions and local authorities), for the effective functioning of the European Union institutions and thus for the Union as a whole."

MEPs highlighted the improvements made by the Constitution, based on four key principles:

- greater clarity about the Union's nature and objectives: the complex set of European treaties would be replaced by a single more readable document, the Union's dual legitimacy - as a Union of States and citizens - would be reaffirmed, the canon of values common to all the Member States would be made explicit and widened, the confusion between the "European Community" and "European Union" would end, European legal acts would be simplified and made more understandable, and a solidarity clause between Member States would allow for support from all parts of the Union in the event of a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster;

-greater effectiveness and a strengthened role in the world: qualified majority voting by the governments meeting in Council would be extended, the European Council would have a two-and-a-half-year chair instead of a 6-month rotating one, there would be a reduction in the number of members of the Commission, the Union's visibility and capacity as a global actor would be significantly enhanced through the creation of a European "Foreign Minister" responsible for a single external action service and through the conferral of legal personality on the Union;

- more democratic accountability: the European Parliament would as a rule decide on an equal footing with the Council on the Union's legislation, the Council would meet in public when debating and adopting Union legislation, the adoption of all EU legislation would be subject to the prior scrutiny of national parliaments, which would receive all EU proposals in good time before the Council adopts a position, the President of the Commission would be elected by the European Parliament, and all EU expenditure would require the approval of both the Council and the European Parliament;

- more rights for citizens: the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights would be incorporated into the Constitution, the EU would accede to the European Convention on Human Rights, a European citizens' right of initiative would be introduced, and individuals would have greater access to justice in connection with EU law.

Finally, the report rejected certain criticisms as unfounded, stating: "the Constitution will not lead to the creation of a centralised superstate, will strengthen rather than weaken the Union's social dimension and does not ignore the historical and spiritual roots of Europe since it refers to its cultural, religious and humanist inheritance".