

"What does the Reform Treaty mean for the E.U."

Professor Ioannis **Vallinakis**, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs introduced the discussion, by stressing that the Reform Treaty ends the process of institutional reform and opens the way for a more optimistic course for the European Union. However, he underlined, the Reform Treaty is only the starting point for a wider discussion on the prospects of the European Union and Europe's role in the world. European integration is facing new challenges in an ever-changing globalized world. The EU is composed of 27 member states, which are politically, economically, socially and culturally distinct and the political will of the 27 cannot always be taken as a given. Can the EU speak with one voice and can the Reform Treaty contribute to the promotion of European values worldwide? Professor Vallinakis emphasizes that the Reform Treaty, by keeping the larger part of the European Constitution, is the necessary step for addressing the challenges the EU faces at present and in the immediate future. Although the Reform Treaty is not a perfect text, and is unavoidably a compromise between the 27 member states, it will make the EU more effective, more efficient and more flexible, while addressing the needs of European citizens. However, as the European Constitution ratification crisis showed, citizens' levels of trust towards the European Union are diminishing and Europe needs come closer to its citizens and restore these bonds of trust. Europe was built on values (peace, prosperity, human rights, rule of law) and therein lies its strength.

In the opening of his speech, Professor Panayiotis **Ioakimides**, University of Athens and Member of the Board of Directors, ELIAMEP, reflected on the length of the EU's institutional reform. The Reform Treaty is the final point of a long process of reform which started 7 years ago with the Declaration of Nice. At the same time, it brings to an end a series of constant change, negotiating and reshuffling, which began in 1985 with the Single European Act. He highlighted the text's complexity: The Reform Treaty consists of 312 pages, of which 86 are protocols, 25 are annexes and 26 are declarations. Secondly, the language of the text is highly technical and difficult, constantly referring to the Treaties of Rome and Maastricht. The Reform Treaty, though, provides a new institutional setting which will allow the EU to become more effective and democratic. In particular, Professor Ioakimides focused on ten points:

- The Reform treaty simplifies the EU by abolishing the structure of the three pillars and providing the EU with a single legal personality
- It foresees a President of the European Council for 2 ½ years, which will provide the EU with continuity. In addition, it introduces the "group presidency" of the EU, to be run by three member states for 18 months.
- The Reform Treaty creates a Foreign Minister position, albeit under the name Higher Representative for Common and Foreign Security Policy which will chair

- the General Affairs Councils. He will be assisted by an EU External Service (not to be called diplomatic, at the insistence of the British)
- Under the Reform Treaty, the European Commission's size is reduced. The number of Commissioners will be equal to the 2/3 of the number of member states – although this will take effect in 2014. The President of the European Commission will be approved by the European Parliament, following a proposal by the European Council
 - The current complicated voting system which is provided by the Treaty of Nice will be replaced by a new “double-majority” system (55% of member states, 65% of the EU's population)
 - The scope of Qualified Majority System (QMV) will be extended to new policy areas
 - The European Parliament becomes the co-legislator in European legislation, on an almost equal footing as the Council
 - The role of national parliaments will be strengthened
 - The EU competences will be clarified (areas of exclusive or shared EU action)
 - The Charter of Fundamental Rights, although not being part of the Reform Treaty text, gains legal validity

However, how are these reforms going to be put into practice? Professor Ioakimides stressed that to a large extent the implementation of the reforms will depend on the interaction and personalities of the President of the European Council the Commission President and the Higher Representative. The interplay between the three positions and the three personalities will determine the final equilibrium, if there is one. At the same time, it will determine the final outcome between two competing trends for the EU's future: the supranational one (e.g. in the form of a political union, supported by France and others), or the more intergovernmental, strictly economic one (supported by the UK).

In this speech, Mr. Stavros **Lambrinidis**, Member of the European Parliament, Socialist Group concentrated on three issues, in the form of open questions: In a EU of 27 member states, is Europe going to be more united or more fragmented along national lines? Will Europe manage to move towards greater homogeneity among its member states? Secondly, where is Europe heading in terms of its social dimension? Is the EU going to be an entity supportive of the weakest countries, regions and groups? Will it contribute to the protection of the environment and will Europe address climate change? Thirdly, what kind of Europe do we want in terms of its democratic deficit? European citizens do not seem convinced that the EU can protect their rights. Mr. Lambrinidis argued that the Reform Treaty provides some answers to these questions. The text provides some references to a social Europe while the strengthening of the European Parliament's role addresses the EU's democratic deficit. However, more challenges lie ahead and what remains to be seen is whether national governments will be willing and able to promote both their interests but also the common European interest.