

After The Lisbon Treaty: Where Next for Europe?

The British Ambassador, his Excellency Dr. David Landsman, opened the proceedings by underscoring that in order to make the Lisbon Treaty work, a considerable amount of follow-up would be necessary. What were some of the suggestions discussed during the meeting?

Prof. Kevin Featherstone (London School of Economics) argued that the German-French leadership in the EU is faltering. Confronted with a weaker European Commission the EU was in need of identifying the new “big idea” that could take EU integration forward. Could the Agenda 2020, or climate change, or energy security become the focus of the EU’s endeavors? The jury is still out, but Prof Featherstone emphasized that any progress would have to take place without treaty changes.

Prof. Panayiotis Ioakimidis (University of Athens) rather concurred with this view, underscoring that whatever the EU and/or Commission does, it should be undertaken without a new Lisbon-style treaty. Instead, incremental steps were in order, e.g. in areas such as reducing and unifying the number of presidents the EU currently has, i.e. six in total. Furthermore, Prof. Ioakimidis called on the need for more political union in which the primacy of politics over economics prevails.

Rt Hon. Denis MacShane (MP, UK Labor Party) tried to explain what a European pessimist is, namely a “European optimist with accurate information”. He identified the Balkanisation of the European Union and argued the case that the Greek crisis is a symptom of a wider crisis of the EU. Issues such as demography deserved greater attention as Europe was getting older much faster than it was getting richer. The Rt Hon. MacShane called on the EU to integrate Ukraine and express a “tougher” stance vis-à-vis Russia.

Mr. Angus Lapsley (Head of EU External Relations, UK Representation to the EU) described the concern in Brussels that the EU risks being marginalized in world affairs. In order to stop such a development it was pertinent to pool resources in areas such as energy security, use available instruments in crisis management coherently and show consistency of leadership. Otherwise, the joke could become reality that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton dialed Brussels and received the answering machine which asked them to dial 1 for Germany and 2 for France.

Prof. Yannis Stouraras (Director General, IOBE) expanded on the anatomy of failure in Greece. The Greek economy had lost competitiveness while consuming too much (in percent/GDP) and exporting too little during the past decade. In a word, “Greece is the last Soviet style economy in Europe” claimed Prof. Stouraras. His call for immediate structural reforms in Greece focused on the need for pension reform and opening up markets and professions.

Prof Loukas Tsoukalis (President of ELIAMEP) shed light on the fact that “we now have a new treaty and an economic crisis simultaneously”. Market

integration among EU member states had proceeded during the past decade much faster than political integration. However, with the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 we are witnessing the end of an epoch. The dynamics of the crisis had exposed the inadequacy of monitoring instruments at EU level. In addition, a fundamental weakness rested in the absence of a lender of last resort. While the proposition to establish a European Monetary Fund required treaty change, the immediate focus should rather be on ad hoc arrangements to confront the ensuing crisis.