

[Comment] Words are easy, actions are harder

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EUOBSERVER / COMMENT - The political season resumes after the summer break with renewed discussions about what to do with the constitutional treaty. Ratification – and confidence – came to a rather sudden halt in the early summer of last year, when the French and the Dutch voted No. Since then we have been in a period of reflection, thinking about what to do next.

Ideas and proposals for the next steps are starting to emerge. French presidential contender Nicolas Sarkozy, two weeks ago in Brussels, put forward some ideas. Italian prime minister Romano Prodi joined in last week. Other political figures will follow. Their ideas are needed, but they will not be enough.

Their ideas are needed, because there is still much to be done. For example, Europe needs a common voice in the world if it is to be really influential. Individual expressions of foreign policy count for less than a combined and coherent approach by all EU member states together.

Furthermore, the EU is in a unique position to be able to use its voice in the world to argue for a fairer international order. The EU embodies itself a new approach to international relations, and should aim to spread this idea around the world. The rule of law is becoming paramount; power and influence should be shared more fairly around the world, having been prized from the hands of the traditional powers.

These words are easy, but the actions will be rather harder.

Take the case of the EU's participation in the International Monetary Fund, which was reported yesterday (18 September) in EUobserver.com. Here is a good example of the difference that the EU could make, if it had a shared and stronger voice to articulate its new approach.

The IMF supervises the global financial system, providing assistance to individual countries when needed. Of course, while its field is economics, these are not narrow technical decisions that it is taking. Tackling crises and refloating stricken economies are intensely political acts. Critics of the way globalisation is being managed have the IMF firmly in their sights.

A current proposal is to grant greater voting strength in the IMF to some emerging economies, which have grown faster than average in recent years and so are by now under-represented. These include countries such as China, South Korea and Mexico.

Of course, voting strength is a zero-sum game. If these emerging countries get more votes, other, more established countries must necessarily have fewer. And suddenly the EU's desire for a new, more balanced world order isn't quite so strong.

Another idea is that the EU should have a single seat in the IMF, combining all the voting strength of all its 25 member states. This would give it greater influence than it has at present, influence which all the member states would like to have at their disposal.

But again, when it comes to taking action, the willingness is not yet there. Different countries can find different reasons why the general principle of a common voice should, on this occasion, not be applied.

Talk about the future of the constitutional treaty is important. But without an equivalent

commitment to action, the easy words will not be enough.

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