

AT LARGE

Europe as Weltmacht

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European leaders are giddy like school children before Christmas. The European Union is about to install a president and foreign minister. Then, the European elite insist, the continent can act as a true counterweight to the U.S.

The European Union began decades ago as a small organization for economic cooperation. Over time it expanded to 27 states and took on significant political roles. In 2004 leading Eurocrats drafted a constitution to turn the still loose federation into something closer to a continental nation state. Most notable was the shift of responsibilities, or "competencies," from member governments to Brussels, reduced national vetoes over EU decisions, appointment of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs, creation of a European foreign service, and appointment of a permanent President of the European Council.

But the European establishment pushed one agreement too far. Voters in France and the Netherlands said no, killing the accord. The lesson was clear. Former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing opined: "Above all, it is to avoid having referendums." The European governments moved a few commas and made the document even more abstruse, before reissuing it as a treaty that only required parliamentary approval.

But Ireland's constitution mandated a referendum and last June the Irish shocked the Eurocrats by voting no. One British Labor MP called the Irish "extremely arrogant." German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble complained that "a few million Irish cannot decide on behalf of 495 million Europeans," preferring instead that a few thousand Euroelites do the deciding.

After briefly toying with the idea of either kicking out the recalcitrant Celts or confining Ireland to secondary status, the EU establishment insisted that Ireland vote again. The treaty passed the second time in October, primarily due to economic scare-mongering. Judith Crosbie wrote in *European Voice*: "the vote largely reflected concerns about the Irish economy, with most voters saying 'Yes' to staying close to where the money is," even though Lisbon actually offered no economic benefits.

Then the treaty was held up by Czech President Vaclav Klaus, who refused to sign his nation's ratification. This sparked more than the usual petulance from other European

leaders, including demands for his impeachment. In early November Klaus acquiesced, allowing the Eurocrats to get down to important business: divvying up the political spoils.

In theory, Lisbon was about more important issues. Irish Sen. Deirdre de Burca argued: "If I had to name just one compelling reason to support the Lisbon Treaty, however, it is because the treaty will enhance the capacity of the EU to become a more effective actor at an international level." Similarly, claimed Wilfried Martens, a leading Member of the European Parliament, "the EU must be united and able to speak with one voice on the world stage."

Europeans were acutely aware that the continent is still seen as largely as an economic entity. Charles Grant, director of the Centre for European Reform, complained: "On many of the world's big security problems, the EU is close to irrelevant. Talk to Russian, Chinese or Indian policy-makers about the EU, and they are often withering. They view it as a trade bloc that had pretensions to power but has failed to realize them because it is divided and badly organized." Similarly, said President Sarkozy, the treaty was necessary since "Europe cannot be a dwarf in terms of defense and a giant in economic matters."

In short, Lisbon was about Europe, not Europeans. There is no evidence that most Europeans worry much about whether people around the world think of Europe as an equal to the U.S., China, and Russia. But Eurocrats worry about it.

Yet while supposedly hoping to use Lisbon to turn Europe into a Weltmacht, leading Europeans now are engaged in an unseemly squabble over offices. The plotting has grown ever more intense with the approach of Thursday's summit, and scheduled decision on the new president and foreign minister.

Despite Lisbon's many claimed benefits, the treaty has not changed Europe. The EU remains an amalgam of nations rather than a single political community. Since the center-right is ascendant, conservative governments claimed the presidency. But the center-left must be mollified, so its representatives expect the foreign ministry -- a prescription for divisive inaction. The Poles are demanding a genuine say in the decision, and perhaps even one of the positions, for the Central and Eastern European states. *Times* columnist Brownen Maddox observed: "The haggling over Europe's new top jobs resembles that old children's card game of mixing up the heads, bellies and feet of different animals, for a deliberately postposterous result."

There's more, however. Some Eurocrats argue that British officials should not be considered because even if they, most notably former Prime Minister Tony Blair and current Foreign Minister David Miliband, personally are Europhiles, the majority of Britons are Euroskeptics. And Blair, of course, was chummy with U.S. President George W. Bush and supported the Iraq war.

Even stranger, after pushing a treaty to strengthen Europe, some of the governments want to select new officers who won't strengthen Europe. For instance, Denmark, Finland, and Ireland issued a joint statement advocating a "chairman not a chief" for the Council presidency. This means, as the *Economist* puts it, EU leaders talking "to themselves"

rather than "to the world." One reason is rivalry between the European Commission (representing the continent) and the European Council (representing governments). Still, someone more attentive to EU governance might be useful in a petty-bureaucratic sense. George Wittman pointed to the need to "bring some order to a bureaucracy at EU headquarters in Brussels that has mutated and proliferated like a bad case of hives." Alas, as Wittman observed, there are few things at which Europe better excels than bureaucratic growth.

However, a chairman won't enhance Europe's international influence. There's a good argument for not claiming that any one person speaks for 500 million Europeans but, as the *Wall Street Journal* observed, "this is an argument against the Lisbon Treaty itself." The Eurocrats cheerfully told their publics that Lisbon was necessary to promote EU efficiency while telling each other that Lisbon was necessary to promote EU influence. The elite defenestrated concern over accountability and representativeness long ago.

Having decided that the lack of a European polity didn't matter, it would make sense to choose someone who might help the continent fulfill its potential. As a friend of Tony Blair's observed in making the pitch for the former premier's candidacy, "God knows what the Americans would do if we got [a] Belgian as European president. They already can't be bothered with us most of the time."

Yet after going to the trouble of ramming through a treaty that polls indicate was opposed by popular majorities in half of the EU member states, EU leaders apparently plan to reject the most impressive candidates for the top jobs. Blair was the early favorite for president, but has faded. The field is dominated by a gaggle of colorless national politicians.

Current candidates include Belgium's Herman Van Rompuy, Denmark's Jan Peter Balkenende, Ireland's Mary Robinson, Latvia's Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Luxembourg's Jean-Claude Juncker, and Sweden's Fredrik Reinfeldt. All of these people are respectable and accomplished in various ways -- Van Rompuy is noted for his haiku writing, for instance -- but none will "stop the traffic" in foreign capitals, as Miliband put it. The lack of international gravitas doesn't mean President Barack Obama won't ever call, but he will phone the British prime minister, French president, German chancellor, and perhaps the leaders of Italy, Poland, and Spain first.

Blair could still reemerge in the EU's "time-honored fashion... the cosy back-room stitch-up," in the words of the *Times* of London. One Eastern European diplomat complained: "Trying to work out who is going to be President of the EU Council is not dissimilar to decoding who was in or out in the Kremlin in the 1970s. It seems strange to many of us that 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall we have to dust off our Kremlinology skills here in Brussels."

However, even choosing Tony Blair or a similar figure likely wouldn't matter much to the EU. As the British think tank Open Europe observed: "the idea for a President is mostly about giving the EU a symbolic, political figurehead to help propel its wild dreams about becoming a world superpower." The so-called European Project remains far from

completion.

Europe remains deeply divided over international issues, and those differences won't disappear through attempts by another official, even one as charming and talented as Blair, in Brussels to plaster over the cracks. Nor is adding a foreign minister -- here, too, there are favorites and underdogs in a constantly changing race -- and diplomatic corps enough to create a united foreign policy.

Moreover, as French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner observed: "We must bear in mind, the necessity of supporting our diplomatic efforts with a common defense, a European defense.... Without this European defense our diplomacy lacks strength." Yet no one in Europe is interested in spending more on the military, creating forces which are combat capable, or deploying troops in harm's way. Even Great Britain is likely to retrench militarily in the face of a deep and prolonged recession.

Most Europeans live meaningful lives without great concern over how their continent is viewed in Washington or elsewhere. But Europe's political leadership remains burdened by the old Henry Kissinger insult: what's Europe's phone number? The Lisbon Treaty was drafted in part to provide such a phone number.

However, the EU remains a collection of nation states, not a nation state. Despite the forced passage of Lisbon, the differences among EU members remain great. And the addition of a president and foreign minister won't make anyone more willing to die for Brussels. Until Europeans are more loyal to Europe than their home countries, the European project will remain unfinished and unfulfilled. And the Lisbon Treaty will prove to be costly diversion.

Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is the author of *Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics (Crossway)*.