

One small step for union, one giant leap for uniformity

The post-Lisbon landscape of Europe looks bland, uninspiring and over-managed, but the boring image could well conceal something of greater concern

It was impossible not to sympathise with the plight of the former leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage MEP, as he delivered his verdict on the new “top jobs” in the EU. Mr Farage was, unusually, almost lost for words: after all, the appointment of two political nonentities as President of the Council and High Representative for foreign policy hardly looked like the next step along the road to the European superstate UKIP has been forecasting.

“Disgraceful,” was the best Mr Farage could produce, referring to the Council horse-trading that had produced the results and the fact that High Representative Baroness Ashton’s political elevation had been achieved without the inconvenience of election. It seemed that not even UKIP could see the dread hand of European federalism at work laying this first brick of the post-Lisbon architecture.

The rest of the world seemed not to know whether to smirk or shake its head in disbelief. Neither Baroness Ashton nor the new Council President, Belgian Prime Minister Herman van Rompuy, looked like one of the international power-brokers that we had been led to expect. Were these really the people to propel the EU to a leading role on the international stage?

In fact, the anointing of Mr van Rompuy and Baroness Ashton is completely in accord with the new arrangements that brought about their promotion. The Lisbon Treaty – née

the European Constitution – is not about politics. Its chief purpose is to do with management and it has thus created additional layers in an attempt to impose “consensus” more firmly on the still distressingly nationalistic member states.

In that respect, the new executive directors seem ideal. Both have risen without trace through the pathways of management – we are tempted to recall the Peter Principle relating to advancement and competence. Both have reputations that resonate only among their own managerial classes and both lard their public utterances with the buzzwords of management-speak. Post-Lisbon Europe could hardly be better served.

While commercial management can sometimes be imaginative and innovative and benefit from big personalities, those are not qualities required in bureaucracies. Their survival depends upon a certain drab uniformity (see “consensus” above) enforced by Kafkaesque regulation unintelligible to those outside the circle. Consequently, Mr van Rompuy will direct an army of civil servants whose job will be to bamboozle the leaders of the member states into what can be presented to their voters as the desirable “European” approach.

Baroness Ashton will command a budget of £3.6 billion a year and 3,000 new bureaucrats spanning the globe to mould the foreign relations of what

used to be 27 sovereign governments into a similar “European” position.

For such responsibilities, a distinct lack of charisma is beneficial. Already there have been mutterings among governments that their foreign affairs ministries are being downgraded and concern at a suggestion that their ministers should become EU envoys instead. How long before similar diminution overtakes national justice departments, social security ministries and treasuries? In order to complete this process, Brussels has calculated that for the moment it needs an invisible managerial hand, rather than a political Colossus, so as to confuse potential opposition.

These are early days, however. The European project is a long-term venture and far from being popular (which is why the successor to the rejected Constitution was not generally submitted to electorates and written in such a way as to avoid unpredictable votes in the future). That being so, the appointments of two unknowns were designed not to frighten the horses – hence Mr Farage’s difficulty in responding. The promoters of the single European state know that their vision can only be realised through attrition, not by revolution. Our new managers have the task of achieving a bland, ideology-free European uniformity. Once that is in place, their successors will be free to go all out for full European Union.

INSIDE: 27 minds with but a single thought? p.2 - EU fund rules ‘could choke investment’ p.3 - Fishing policy reform tied up in nets p.3 - EU trade: Doha may be the top priority, but barriers and anomalies remain p.4 - A minor key for the election campaign p.5 - Letters p.6 – UKIP should make clear what it is really for p.6