

## **“CELEBRATING THE GOTELIS PROCESS” :**

### **OR “HALF-TRUTHS AND HALF TEXTS FOR THE HALF AWAKE”**

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It seems only yesterday that the Heads of Government and State (aka the HOGS) with attendant Ministers of Environment and Industry, descended on the ancient seaside city of Gotelis. The sun beat down fiercely on its rain-sodden streets. Its prettily painted houses glistened in the Atlantic sunlight with those pastel shades so typical of Portugal and Sweden. Ministers dined on local seafood delicacies – sardines, gravadlax, prawns and cod bacalao – washed down with large quantities of white port and acquavit.

The Gotelis Process was born, but few now remember the conclusion that the fishy smelling ministers finally came to. Henceforth the European Union was committed to the understanding that high environmental standards are the key to international competitiveness and present a huge opportunity for European business to steal a march on more backward competitors in North America and Asia ...

That’s the trouble with Processes, Strategies and Agendas – nobody really remembers what they actually said. All too often their conclusions are either garbled or hijacked. Who can now sketch even the outlines of the Weston Super Mare Process on truth telling in European political life that was once so closely associated with the name of Jeffery Archer? Even fewer can name the seven points of the Rennes le Chateau Agenda pushed so strongly by Francois Mitterand to promote a common European policy on public monuments and medieval heresy.

What is to happen once summit meetings take place only in Brussels? Where will the romance remain? We can’t generate twenty Brussels Processes. Who will rally to the cry of “support Brussels Process Nine!” Maybe our masters will decide to name Agendas and Strategies after buildings. I think I could go into a political fight to defend the Justis Lipsius Strategy. And a Charlemagne Process would certainly get my vote. But I’m not so sure about a “Nice Little Bar Near The Bourse Agenda”.

Can somebody tell me who decides when a product of Union deliberations becomes known as an Agenda, a Process or a Strategy? Having knocked around in European circles since 1968 I’m sure I ought to know the difference between a Declaration and Conclusions. As always when puzzled I went first to my friends at EurActiv to whom I am indebted for the following quote *“The EU debate on sustainable development can be divided into two fields (though they are clearly interlinked). The first one focuses mainly on how to integrate environmental issues into other EU policy areas*

*(the Cardiff process) and how to make EU policy more sustainable (Gothenburg declaration). The second field concerns the EU's role in the global aspects of sustainable development".* So that's clear then! In fact, as in so much else, I am indebted to Catherine Day, Director General of DG Environment for a speech in Belfast in October 2003, which elegantly lays out the relationship between the Cardiff, Lisbon and Gothenburg things. But that was before certain spin doctors got into the business of changing our perceptions by stressing some aspects of Lisbon. For the record the HOGS agreed in March 2002 that they would make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

All this by way of introduction to the simple observation that the Lisbon Agenda has recently been hijacked, misrepresented and generally abused by those who are more concerned to undermine Europe's environmental policies than they are to genuinely build Europe's international competitiveness. The battle is on to use Lisbon as a battering ram for a wholesale demolition of Community regulation in a wide range of fields. Half-truths and half texts for the half awake is an old communications tactic. These issues are far too important to be treated in such a simplistic fashion. The European Union needs to walk on two legs. The Lisbon Agenda needs to be seen in the context of the agreements reached in Gothenburg. Political opponents of President Ford used to claim that he had trouble walking and chewing gum at the same time. Europe is perfectly capable of setting Lisbon in the context of Gothenburg. They are compatible and essential signposts on the way forward. They are not alternative ideological sticks, useful for beating the heads of incoming Commissioners. The Dutch Presidency with its "Clean, Clever and Competitive" slogan is right on target, and the battle must be fought between now and November first.

In many ways Commission President Barroso might feel more at home in Lisbon; but Gothenburg matters just as much. Indeed to carry forward the Portuguese-Swedish collaboration so beloved by the people of Gotelis, the sooner he and Margot Walstrom declare the two subjects to be inextricably intertwined the better. They may not find Gotelis or Lisaburg in the atlas, but they need to find an early moment at which to knock European heads together on the subject. And this time, given the state of the world's fisheries and the toxic nature of some Baltic salmon, they might eat rather less fish.

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