

The man who let us read the EU constitution

Brigadier Anthony Cowgill, who died last week, put together an intelligible text of the Lisbon Treaty when no one else would

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After eight years of tortuous discussion, the Lisbon Treaty, by hook or by crook (but mostly, some would say, by crook), is all but a done deal. The EU will shortly have its constitution by any other name and take its place on the world stage as a fully fledged government, complete with its President (not Tony Blair), Foreign Minister (not David Miliband), an unelected Cabinet (in the shape of the European Council) and enormous new powers over all our lives.

Strangely, however, thanks to the skulduggery whereby they had to pretend that the treaty was not the constitution they wanted, we are not yet officially allowed to read the constitution we shall all have to live under. To assist their sleight of hand, the document the politicians signed at Lisbon consists only of amendments to previous treaties (copied out verbatim from the rejected constitution). Read out of context, these amount to little more than gobbledegook.

The one person who made it possible for us to read our new constitution in comprehensible form was Brigadier Anthony Cowgill of the British Management Data Foundation (BMDF). With extraordinary diligence, and much aided by his son Andrew, he produced a “consolidated” version of the treaty, putting all the amendments into context. What is more, over the past 17 years, Tony Cowgill had performed this invaluable service for each new European treaty in turn, used by politicians, civil servants, lawyers and others all over Europe.

On Thursday night this remarkable man, an unsung hero of our time and a good friend of mine for over 20 years, died just before his 94th birthday. Last Sunday, in my last conversation with him, he said “the secret of remaining active is to remain active”.

I hope to be able to pay proper tribute elsewhere to Tony Cowgill’s various impressive contributions to our country’s life, including his leading part in correcting the woeful misrepresentations of the episode in Austria at the end of the Second World War, when we handed back a large number of Cossacks to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, anyone wanting to read his meticulously annotated edition of our new constitution in full, *The Lisbon Treaty in Perspective*, should ring the BMDF on 01452 812837 for details.