

How to achieve a political unification of Europe ?

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 During the last two months Europe has continued to surprise us with its continuous will to re-think itself. Like a grown-up who refuses to accept that teenager years are over, the EU continues to debate and debate whether it should become a political union or remain an economic free-trade area, like if this would be an option!

Having the EU as an economic free-trade area without political unity is like accepting globalization can work without rules, it is like accepting that a 50 year old can still be a teenager...

The problem of the EU is not WHETHER it needs political unification or not but rather HOW this political unification should be achieved. The Irish NO to the Lisbon treaty clearly shows that the problem is not the message – which was manipulated and not understood- but the methodology of ratification. Ratification by unanimity proved difficult with 6, 12 and 15 member states and it is just impossible for a Union of 27.

In the meantime important directives and policies have been approved at European level; the directive on return of illegal immigrants, the waste framework directive, the voluntary register for EU lobbies… the EU continues to work at high speed and with a remarkable efficiency leaving ground for many to claim that democratic reforms are not needed because the EU works anyway. This is like claiming that China doesn't need political reforms because the economy performs well anyhow.

The social and economic success of the EU in the long run is based on the solidity, credibility and legitimacy of its institutions and building a Union without strong democratic checks and balances poses great risks to our future.

This is why we need the Lisbon Treaty to enter into force and to continue to move towards the political integration of Europe. Consequently, UEF will continue to ask for ratification of treaties by majority and ask for further democratization of the EU with the promotion of the link between European Parliament elections and the election of the European Commission's president.

During the last month UEF has continued with the campaign “Who is your candidate”, gaining support from more citizens, partners and personalities. On the 24th of June UEF organised a debate in Brussels where both the Liberal and Green parties announced their will to nominate their candidates for president of the European Commission. The EPP and the PSE excused their presence to the debate in what can be considered a political message on the future deals for the highest position in the EU.

With the three No from French, Dutch and Irish to the institutional reforms during last 5 years, the next European Parliament elections are a definitive credibility test for the EU.

It is crucial that the European political parties run true European campaigns and that the position of president of the European Commission is linked to the vote in the EP elections.

It is therefore good that Poettering and Sarkozy announce publicly that their candidate for President of the Commission is Barroso, but it would be even better if the European People Party would announce it. Then the ball would be in the socialist court, forcing the PSE to nominate their candidate.

The French presidency started in the month of June promising headlines and leadership. President Sarkozy delivered a powerful speech in the European Parliament on 10th of July; the tone resembled the speech delivered by Blair in 2005 when the UK was taking the EU presidency. For the moment they both have in common that they start by promising a lot, let's hope the French presidency will deliver more than the British did.

The motivation of Sarkozy to get the Lisbon treaty ratified as soon as possible it is to be welcomed. However, it remains to be seen whether the French will dare to shift from working on the symptoms towards working on the root of the problem of adopting new treaties; that is ratification by unanimity.

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