

GALLUP

Europe's World

THE ONLY EUROPE-WIDE POLICY JOURNAL

Home Subscribe About EW Partners & Advertisers Editorial Board Advisory Board Academic Partners

BOOKMARK

Current issue



EUROPE

Responding to Ireland's "no": Public opinion must see that the treaty underpins our diversity

Autumn 2008

by Constantine Simitis



Irish voters' rejection of the Lisbon treaty reflects Europe's difficult debate of how best we can reconcile democracy and diversity. Some see the diversity issue primarily in terms of the treatment of migrants who have to contend with xenophobia and racism. Others see it in terms of the coexistence of different groups with different customs and religions as well as the integration, and by extension include the problem of terrorism. But the issue relating to democracy and diversity that I see as crucial is the relationship within the EU between the supranational and the national; in other words, how can we preserve diversity while also pursuing the common aims of the people of Europe?

It is a commonplace that the European Union accepts the diversity of Europe's peoples, with all their cultural, linguistic, regional and national distinctions. Yet, the Irish referendum has demonstrated that the prevailing mood is nowadays quite different. The rejection of the treaty illustrated voters' fears that further integration will inevitably spell the end of diversity. These are unfounded anxieties, because in fact the reverse is true. The best way to protect Europe's diversity is to support the EU's continuing development because a stronger European Union will mean that Europeans can tackle their problems more effectively.

Like earlier treaties, the premise of the Lisbon treaty is that unity is the best protector of diversity. The Union will always retain its member states' distinctive national flavours because the member governments themselves determine the red lines that must not be crossed. When collective interests are being defined, it is the interests of the nation state that are predominant, and that safeguard has been maintained through successive treaties by the community model.

MATTERS OF OPINION

Ireland's missing voters – who abstained and why

Two-thirds (67%) of those questioned in a Eurobarometer survey of 2,000 people conducted immediately after Ireland's recent referendum on the Lisbon treaty said the "no" campaign on the treaty had been more convincing, and this view was even held by a majority of the "yes" voters (57%). More than half those polled said that they only decided whether to vote "yes" or "no" in the final weeks of the campaign and 15% decided on the day itself.

Over half those who did not vote in the referendum said this was because they didn't understand the issues, and more than half of these (54%) said they would have liked more information from the Irish government.

Ireland's young voters were especially reluctant to participate in the referendum; more than twice as many in the 18-24 year-old age group abstained than among the over-55s (64% compared to 31%). Fewer than half of those interviewed who were students or unemployed had voted (40 and 49%, respectively), compared to a higher-than-average turnout among the self-employed (61%) and retired people (67%).

There was a marked difference in voting between age groups: nearly two-thirds (65%) of young people aged 18-24 voted "no" in the referendum, compared with fewer than half (42%) of the over-55s.

Friday 14 November 2008

My profile

You are not logged in.
Please log in or register to submit comments or rate articles.

Register Log in

NEW EUROPE



www.neurope.eu

Eu funding & Grants

Put the chances on your side with
EulcomEurope



SEARCH BY:

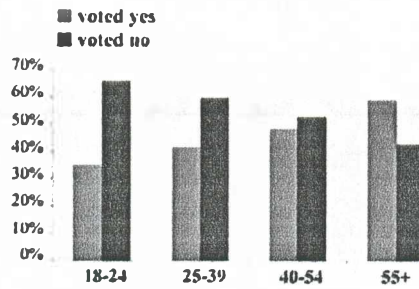
Issue

General keywords

FULL SEARCH:

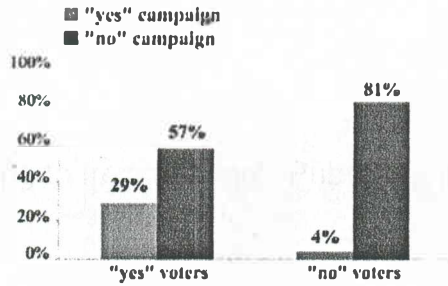
Go

YOUNG VS. OLD VOTERS



Source: Eurobarometer 2004

WHICH CAMPAIGN WAS THE MOST CONVINCING?



Source: Eurobarometer 2004

<http://www.gallupworldpoll.com/>

Although the Lisbon treaty therefore satisfactorily addressed the whole diversity question, we can nevertheless expect increasing pressure on the fault line separating supranational and the national interests for a variety of economic and social reasons. Unresolved problems that include disputes between member states, and the need for the Union to find new solutions seem very likely to intensify people's doubts about whether we've got the right balance between democracy and diversity.

The emergence of shared values has become central to the EU experience; a shared path has been built on member states' different histories, experiences, references and symbols. The result is a European Union whose supranational content is common to the citizens of all its member states. That leads us to the question of whether or not we Europeans yet have shared political affiliations. It's an ongoing quest and a vitally important one because it's the only way the nations of Europe can remain authors of their own identities while avoiding conflict with the identities of others.

Public debate is the key to creating shared political affiliations. It can clarify which aspects of diversity are in need of protection, and it can help determine how that protection can be achieved. Debate can thus be a motivating force that creates common expectations, makes our shared interests more apparent and helps to further shape Europe's collective identity.

Economic and Monetary Union offers a good example of how our success in resolving the problems that surrounded the common currency created a broader awareness of many other issues relating to the currency. There is now a likely Europe-wide debate on whether the euro contributes to inflation, whether its high value puts European exports at risk and whether the interest rates set by the European Central Bank are facilitating home-buyers. All of which goes to show that a forum for debate emerges automatically when a common policy exists and issues arise, that are of concern to the public.

The example of the euro also underlines that progress towards a more democratic and united Europe does not result from grand plans for the future, but rather from specific solutions to common issues. EMU and the Schengen Agreement, coupled with the common foreign and defence policies identified in the new treaty, are mapping out new ways to respect and transcend national identities. They are initiatives that ensure union in diversity, and they also generate a European public forum. Such joint efforts, consciously fostered by the European Union, will gradually weave a unifying web carrying the integration project further forward.

The degree to which we Europeans can maintain our diversity will depend on the progress we make towards greater unification, the creation of a European public forum and the deepening of our democracy. The relationship between the supranational and the national can be developed creatively so long as our joint efforts tackle real problems of concern to Europe's citizens. And that in turn is why the Lisbon treaty is such an important next step; it would allow the Union to become more effective, both by giving it the means to deal with its existing problems, and by promoting the sort of common endeavours that will enable us to progress further in the years ahead.

> [Email to Constantine Simitis](#)

[Version française](#)

You need to be logged in to rate and comment on articles.

Click the log on or register button in the top right corner of this page.

Average rating:



Constantinos Simitis

Από: Hendrik ROGGEN (Europe's World) [Hendrik.ROGGEN@europesworld.org]
Αποστολή: Τρίτη, 14 Οκτωβρίου 2008 1:12 μμ
Προς: Constantinos Simitis
Θέμα: Europe's World
Συνημμένα: EW10_Responding to Ireland's no_ENG.pdf

α Ορίγιν

Dear Mr. Simitis,

Please find attached the pdf version of your article published in the Autumn issue of *Europe's World*. I would like to thank you very warmly for your contribution. I know it will do much to stir the European policy debate. Two printed copies will be mailed to you shortly.

I would be most grateful if you could find a moment to let me have any reactions to this issue, along with suggestions for future authors and topics. I would also encourage you to post your article on your own website, should you wish.

We would be happy to send this issue of *Europe's World* with your compliments to up to half a dozen people. If that's of interest, do please let us have their names and addresses by 20 October.

Kind regards,
 Hendrik Roggen

Hendrik Roggen
 Editorial Coordinator
 Europe's World
 Bibliothèque Solvay, Parc Léopold
 rue Belliard 137, B - 1040 Brussels
 Tel:
 Fax:
 E-mail: hendrik.roggen@europesworld.org
www.europesworld.org

*Dear Mr Roggen
 Thank you for responding to your email 14 Oct and
 on behalf of mr Simitis please find
 some names in order to send this issue
 of Europe's world:*

Information from ESET Smart Security, version of virus signature database 3373
 (20080821)

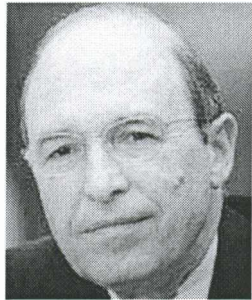
The message was checked by ESET Smart Security.

<http://www.eset.com>

- Margot Walström
 Member of the Commission EU
 Vice-President
- Paul Rasmussen
 President of ESP PES
- Mercedes ----> (Torino)
 Featherstone
- Ingvær Carlsson
- Cooper - (B. Clinton)
 office of William J. Clinton
 55 West 125th Street
 New York, NY 10027
 14/10/2008

- Dora Bakoyanni
 Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Prof. Loukas Tsoukalis
 ELIAMEP
- Dimitzi Spoufas
 President of Greek Parliament
 Syntagma Sq.
- Amato Giuliano
 ACED
- Bernard Kuschner (Μνοῦαν)
 Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Μνοῦαν)
 Minister of Foreign Affairs

Public opinion must see that the treaty underpins our diversity



By **Constantine Simitis**

Irish voters' rejection of the Lisbon treaty reflects Europe's difficult debate of how best we can reconcile democracy and diversity. Some see the diversity issue primarily in terms of the treatment of migrants who have to contend with xenophobia and racism. Others see it in terms of the coexistence of different groups with different customs and religions as well as the integration, and by extension include the problem of terrorism. But the issue relating to democracy and diversity that I see as crucial is the relationship within the EU between the supranational and the national; in other words, how can we preserve diversity while also pursuing the common aims of the people of Europe?

It is a commonplace that the European Union accepts the diversity of Europe's peoples, with all their cultural, linguistic, regional and national distinctions. Yet, the Irish referendum has demonstrated that the prevailing mood is nowadays quite different. The rejection of the treaty illustrated

We need to emphasise that the EU is a "citizens' union" too



By **Laurens Jan Brinkhorst** and **Jacob Hoeksma**

Europe's leaders seem to have got the message; Ireland's "no" to the Lisbon treaty is more than a message from the Irish. It is a symbol of the mistrust felt by people throughout the European Union. That apparently is why the European Council said Dublin could get back in October with ideas about Ireland's next steps. The Council doesn't want to cold shoulder the Irish, but EU leaders also need to confront the wider issue and allay people's fears about Europe's future direction.

It would be easy for politicians simply to blame voters for saying "no, nej, nee and non" in referendums held on successive proposals for EU reform. But a closer examination of the reasons why the Danish, French, Dutch and Irish all said "no" reveals striking similarities. The Danes rejected the Maastricht treaty in 1992 out of concern that the proposed citizenship of the EU

To confound the populists we must strengthen the EU's democratic appeal



By **Franz Fischler**

After the lengthy period of navel-gazing triggered by the French and Dutch rejections of the EU's Constitution, many had hoped that the Lisbon treaty would finally allow the EU to move on and effectively re-engage with the rest of the world. Those hopes were dramatically dashed by Ireland's "no" vote, and a dangerous factor behind has been the growing tendency in a number of member states to place national interests above those of the Union, and indeed above those of the wider world.

The basic principles of solidarity and integration now seem, therefore, to be under threat. Member states continue to abide by these principles only as long as they serve the national interest, and many governments are even beginning to question the added value of the whole European project. This trend had become all too obvious when a number of member states proposed dropping common European symbols like the flag and the anthem at the time of the

Let's go back to one commissioner per country



By **Anneli Jäätteenmäki**

Ireland's "no" to Lisbon is hardly surprising when you consider what the people of Europe really want from constitutional reform. The Laeken declaration that launched the reform process back in 2001 spelt out those demands. It said "citizens are calling for a clear, open, effective, democratically-controlled Community approach, and therefore the Union needs to become more democratic, more transparent and more efficient." the Lisbon treaty is in practice the exact opposite. We were handed down complex and unreadable texts, negotiated in secret and without public scrutiny. A post-referendum Eurobarometer survey found that more than half of the Irish people who decided not to vote said this was due to their lack of understanding of the treaty. In the circumstances, abstention was a rational choice.

Another key factor in the Irish vote was people's fear of losing their country's EU commissioner. According to the Lisbon treaty, after November 2014 the number of

voters' fears that further integration will inevitably spell the end of diversity. These are unfounded anxieties, because in fact the reverse is true. The best way to protect Europe's diversity is to support the EU's continuing development because a stronger European Union will mean that Europeans can tackle their problems more effectively.

"The issue I see as crucial is the relationship between the supranational and the national; how can we preserve diversity while also pursuing the common aims of the people of Europe?"

Like earlier treaties, the premise of the Lisbon treaty is that unity is the best protector of diversity. The Union will always retain its member states' distinctive national flavours because the member governments themselves determine the red lines that must not be crossed. When collective interests are being defined, it is the interests of the nation state that are predominant, and that safeguard has been maintained through successive treaties by the community model.

Although the Lisbon treaty therefore satisfactorily addressed the whole diversity question, we can nevertheless expect increasing pressure on the fault line separating supranational and the national interests for a variety of economic and social reasons. Unresolved problems that include disputes between member states, and the need for the Union to find new solutions seem very likely to intensify people's doubts

would replace their national citizenship. The main reason for the Dutch electorate "no" in 2005 to the proposed EU Constitution was alarm that it would replace their national constitution. The Irish result is thought to suggest that fear of the unknown played an important part.

Opponents of the various EU proposals have unscrupulously yet very successfully exploited these widespread anxieties. They have been able to argue that the EU would become a "superstate" – an undemocratic monster that threatened to be a modern-day version of Thomas Hobbes' autocratic Leviathan. The Lisbon treaty's proponents were unable to dispel these claims, and some of the more prominent "yes" campaigners tried the counter-productive trick of threatening the voters with forecasts of doom and gloom. People sensed they were desperate and voted "no" in droves.

So now you don't need a crystal ball to predict that the opponents of European integration will continue to have the upper hand so long as the European Council cannot refute their allegations. And why can't they? It's because they haven't agreed on their answer yet.

The heads of state and government who make up the European Council are locked in debate about the "finalité" of the EU – which is another way of saying where Europe is heading in the long run. It is a debate that has raged since the dawn of European integration, and still nobody knows whether the process will end with a federation, some kind of a United States of Europe or a confederation where the

Franz Fischler

negotiations on the constitutional treaty. This no doubt reflected blatant political calculations that voters tend to favour their own national symbols over those of the European Union.

Many politicians still use the EU as a scapegoat for unpleasant decisions. But

Annali Jäätteenmäki

commissioners should correspond to two thirds of the number of member states. On today's EU membership figures, that would make 18 commissioners from 27 countries. The European Council could alter this provided EU leaders are unanimous. But so far these leaders have been trying to persuade everyone that the new rotation

MATTERS OF OPINION

Ireland's missing voters – who abstained and why

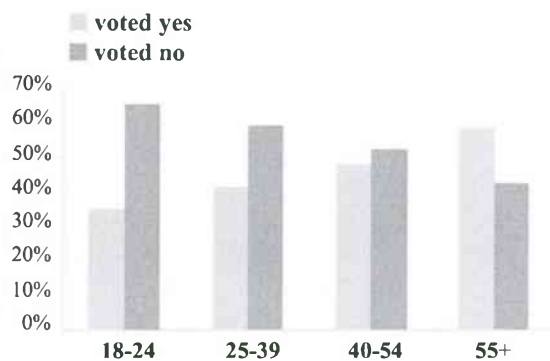
Two-thirds (67%) of those questioned in a Eurobarometer survey of 2,000 people conducted immediately after Ireland's recent referendum on the Lisbon treaty said the "no" campaign on the treaty had been more convincing, and this view was even held by a majority of the "yes" voters (57%). More than half those polled said that they only decided whether to vote "yes" or "no" in the final weeks of the campaign and 15% decided on the day itself.

Over half those who did not vote in the referendum said this was because they didn't understand the issues, and more than half of these (54%) said they would have liked more information from the Irish government.

Ireland's young voters were especially reluctant to participate in the referendum; more than twice as many in the 18-24 year-old age group abstained than among the over-55s (64% compared to 31%). Fewer than half of those interviewed who were students or unemployed had voted (40 and 49%, respectively), compared to a higher-than-average turnout among the self-employed (61%) and retired people (67%).

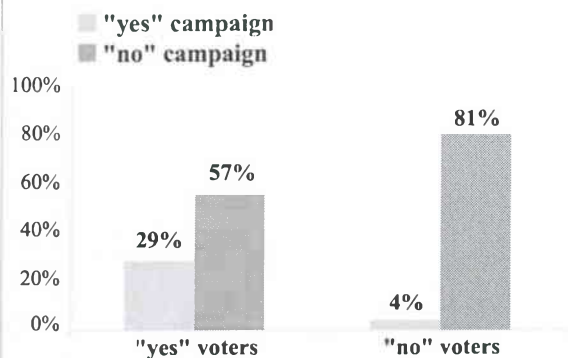
There was a marked difference in voting between age groups: nearly two-thirds (65%) of young people aged 18-24 voted "no" in the referendum, compared with fewer than half (42%) of the over-55s.

YOUNG VS. OLD VOTERS



Source: Eurobarometer 2008

WHICH CAMPAIGN WAS THE MOST CONVINCING?



Source: Eurobarometer 2008

about whether we've got the right balance between democracy and diversity.

The emergence of shared values has become central to the EU experience; a shared path has been built on member states' different histories, experiences, references and symbols. The result is a European Union whose supranational content is common to the citizens of all its member states. That leads us to the question of whether or not we Europeans yet have shared political affiliations. It's an ongoing quest and a vitally important one because it's the only way the nations of Europe can remain authors of their own identities while avoiding conflict with the identities of others.

Public debate is the key to creating shared political affiliations. It can clarify which aspects of diversity are in need of protection, and it can help determine how that protection can be achieved. Debate can thus be a motivating force that creates common expectations, makes our shared interests more apparent and helps to further shape Europe's collective identity.

Economic and Monetary Union offers a good example of how our success in resolving the problems that surrounded the common currency created a broader awareness of many other issues relating to the currency. There is now a likely Europe-wide debate on whether the euro contributes to inflation, whether its high value puts European exports at risk and whether the interest rates set by the European Central Bank are facilitating home-buyers. All of which goes to show that a forum for debate

nation state remains the ultimate source of sovereignty. The Treaty of Rome smoothed over these fundamental differences by saying the aim was to create an "ever closer union between the peoples of Europe." This formula is enshrined in the preamble of the 1957 treaty, and has lasted miraculously well. Political scientists even talk about the "paradox of finalité," a rather bewildering term which means that integration can only make progress as long as the end-goal is carefully left unsaid.

In practical terms, though, the concept of national sovereignty in Europe has already undergone a radical change. Individual states are too small to safeguard their national interests on their own. The EU has therefore become the necessary precondition for the survival of European states in the 21st century.

Perhaps more significant still, the EU today is not just made up of states but is composed of citizens too. In the beginning, individuals were subject to common European rules, and then their EU rights were gradually expanded. This was the foundation of a common citizenship in Europe which is in addition to – rather than instead of – national citizenship. The idea was formally introduced by the Maastricht Treaty and came to fruition during the following decade, notably through the charter of fundamental rights in 2000. When the charter was confirmed by the Lisbon Treaty, this form of citizenship became an essential component of the Union.

This combination of states and citizens in one organisation of governance is a new

Franz Fischler

the Union lacks the capacity to respond quickly to accusations made by national populists, so negative messages often remain unchallenged. That makes it easy to blame the EU for all of the problems afflicting member states, leaving national politicians to take the credit for positive developments.

But given the scale of today's global problems – such as famine in Africa, the price of oil and food, and the climate change challenges – this shift in priorities at the national level is nothing more than an act of negligence. There is something unreal about national politicians calling for a stronger Europe in the world while simultaneously opposing a common foreign policy.

It is the populists on both the far right and the far left that profit most from these tendencies. Yet their actions are actually working against the wider democratic process. The apparent demand in Europe for greater democracy, – through national referenda on EU issues, for example, starts to look absurd when a decision by less than 1m people in a single member state can dictate both the rate of progress, and the general direction of the Union as a whole.

The Irish "no" will, of course, scarcely be a catalyst for breaking-up the union, but it certainly strengthens the separatist forces that already exist within the EU. Europe à la carte has received a major boost from the Irish vote, so it now seems likely that in five years time the overall structure of the EU will still be based around the internal market, while a smaller group of member states will be cooperating more closely in

Anneli Jäätteenmäki

system will allow every member state to have their own commissioner for 10 years out of every 15 years. I myself cannot believe this will work. The Lisbon treaty clearly states that the commissioners will be chosen on a rotation basis that reflects the demographic and geographic weight of the member states. In other words, smaller countries will have to wait longer for their turn than the bigger ones.

"Thankfully, there was a growing acceptance at the European Council just after the Irish vote that keeping one commissioner per country would be a key component of any new deal"

We all know, of course, that the Commission is supposed to be completely independent, and that EU commissioners should neither seek nor take instructions from any government, institution or other body. We also know, however, that in practice they are widely considered to be advocates for their home nations, protecting national political interests and business. Thankfully, there was a growing acceptance at the mid-year European Council summit just after the Irish vote that keeping one commissioner per country would be a key component of any new deal.

Some argue that a Commission with 27 members (or more) is too big and too slow. But let's compare it, say, with the government of France which has 38 ministers for a country of 64m people. How large and bureaucratic is that, Monsieur Sarkozy? The

emerges automatically when a common policy exists and issues arise, that are of concern to the public.

The example of the euro also underlines that progress towards a more democratic and united Europe does not result from grand plans for the future, but rather from specific solutions to common issues. EMU and the Schengen Agreement, coupled with the common foreign and defence policies identified in the new treaty, are mapping out new ways to respect and transcend national identities. They are initiatives that ensure union in diversity, and they also generate a European public forum. Such joint efforts, consciously fostered by the European Union, will gradually weave a unifying web carrying the integration project further forward.

The degree to which we Europeans can maintain our diversity will depend on the progress we make towards greater unification, the creation of a European public forum and the deepening of our democracy. The relationship between the supranational and the national can be developed creatively so long as our joint efforts tackle real problems of concern to Europe's citizens. And that in turn is why the Lisbon treaty is such an important next step; it would allow the Union to become more effective, both by giving it the means to deal with its existing problems, and by promoting the sort of common endeavours that will enable us to progress further in the years ahead. □

Constantine Simitis is a former Prime Minister of Greece and member of the Action Committee on European Democracy (ACED). csimitis@otenet.gr

legal and political phenomenon; it breaks the mould of established international relations. Traditionally, citizens belong to states and only states cooperate in international organisations; citizens are excluded. But the citizens of EU member states are also granted citizenship of an international organisation; they are citizens of the European Union itself. The EU is therefore neither a federation nor a confederation. It creates a new entity in international law that may be described as a "union of citizens and member states."

If EU leaders were to promote the Union in this light, they could start to dispel many of the fears expressed by the people of Ireland and elsewhere. They could explain that the Union does not replace member states, nor does it submerge them in a new superstate. It adds a new European perspective onto the world of tomorrow and grants people new rights, while fully respecting their own national identities. This conclusion would enable the Council to leave the "finalité" debate behind and to communicate the essence of the EU to its citizens in plain and simple terms. It might be their best option to resolve the dilemma created by the Irish "no". □

Laurens Jan Brinkhorst is a former Minister of Economic Affairs of the Netherlands and Professor of International and European Law at Leiden University. Jacob Hoeksma is Director of Euroknow. L.J.Brinkhorst@gmail.com - j.hoeksma@chello.nl - http://www.eu-president.com

Franz Fischler

areas such as foreign and defence policy. The likelihood of a multiple-speed Europe can only be avoided by holding another referendum in Ireland.

Meanwhile, the ratification process must and will continue. As to the Irish political establishment, it will have to consult its people over the future of Ireland's relationship to the EU. This process will need to highlight the risk Ireland runs of being marginalised within the EU. The Dublin government will therefore need to submit proposals aimed at avoiding this, if that indeed is what the Irish people want.

Europe's leaders will in the months ahead need to establish the basis for a more citizen-oriented approach to policymaking. This should be factored into the election strategies of Europe's political groups ahead of mid-2009 elections to European Parliament. A substantial commitment from national political parties to work with their European counterparts will be of crucial importance, for the lack of such a commitment has been one of the greatest weaknesses of EU-level politics.

European politicians must step up their efforts to bring the European project closer to the citizens, whatever the outcome of the current institutional crisis. This is vital if we are to avoid leaving the field open to the populists, and if we are to win the argument that yet closer integration is essential to the future of Europe. □

Franz Fischler, former EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries, is Chairman of Franz Fischler Consult. ffc@franz-fischler-consult.co.at

Anneli Jäätteenmäki

European Union has a population of around 500m, so there's a big difference! Despite this, the current rules laid down by the Nice treaty require a cut in the size of the Commission next time around. No exact number is specified; it will be up to the European Council to decide unanimously on a figure below 27 - unless a new treaty comes into force before June 2009.

The EU has overcome repeated crises in its 50-years history, and I believe that a way will be found out of this one too. But the solution must avoid aggravating the people's distrust of Europe and its institutions. Only half of our citizens trust the EU at the moment, according to the June's Eurobarometer survey and this is real cause for concern. If the people of Ireland – and other smaller member states too – want their own commissioner, then that is something we must keep in mind. The EU can gain legitimacy in many ways and a commissioner from every country is one way to increase the sense of public scrutiny. It should definitely be part of the solution to the EU's latest crisis. □

Anneli Jäätteenmäki is a former Prime Minister of Finland and now Vice-Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee. anneli.jaattenmaki@europarl.europa.eu

Constantinos Simitis**Από:** Hendrik ROGGEN (Europe's World) [Hendrik.ROGGEN@europesworld.org]**Αποστολή:** Πέμπτη, 21 Αυγούστου 2008 12:15 μμ**Προς:** Constantinos Simitis**Θέμα:** Europe's World**Συνημμένα:** Simitis FINAL.doc

Dear Mr. Simitis,

Our Editor-in-Chief has made some final linguistic changes to your article for the October issue of **Europe's World**. If during this process we would have inadvertently introduced any errors or misinterpretations, do please let us know (please use track changes). However, at this stage of the editing process we cannot introduce extensive rewrites. As time is beginning to press, I shall take it that you approve the text unless I hear from you by 27 August.

Kind regards,
Hendrik Roggen

4

Hendrik Roggen
Editorial Coordinator
Europe's World
Bibliothèque Solvay, Parc Léopold
rue Belliard 137, B - 1040 Brussels
Tel: -
Fax: -
E-mail: hendrik.roggen@europesworld.org
www.europesworld.org

Dear Mr. Roggen,
Thank you ^{very much} for the new text. I found everything OK. I agree with it.
Best regards

Dear Mr. Roggen
Thank you very much for the new text.
I found everything O.K., I approve it.
Best regards
Constantine Simitis

OK

Democracy, ~~and~~ diversity and the New Treaty

By **Constantine Simitis**

Irish voters' rejection of the Lisbon treaty reflects Europe's difficult debate of how best we can reconcile democracy and diversity. Some see the diversity issue primarily in terms of the treatment of migrants who have to contend with xenophobia and racism. Others see it in terms of the coexistence of different groups with different customs and religions as well as the integration, and by extension include the problem of terrorism. But the issue relating to democracy and diversity that I see as crucial is the relationship within the EU between the supranational and the national; in other words, how can we preserve diversity while also pursuing the common aims of the people of Europe?

It is a commonplace that the European Union accepts the diversity of Europe's peoples, with all their cultural, linguistic, regional and national distinctions. Yet, the Irish referendum has demonstrated that the prevailing mood is nowadays quite different. The rejection of the treaty illustrated voters' fears that further integration will inevitably spell the end of diversity. These are unfounded anxieties, because in fact the reverse is true. The best way to protect Europe's diversity is to support the EU's continuing development because a stronger European Union will mean that Europeans can tackle their problems more effectively.

Like earlier treaties, the premise of the Lisbon treaty is that unity is the best protector of diversity. The Union will always retain its member states' distinctive national flavours because the member governments themselves determine the red lines that must not be crossed. When collective interests are being defined, it is the interests of the nation state that are predominant, and that safeguard has been maintained through successive treaties by the community model.

Although the Lisbon treaty therefore satisfactorily addressed the whole diversity question, we can nevertheless expect increasing pressure on the fault line separating supranational and the national interests for a variety of economic and social reasons. Unresolved problems that include disputes between member states, and the need for the Union to find new solutions seem very likely to intensify people's doubts about whether we've got the right balance between democracy and diversity.

The emergence of shared values has become central to the EU experience; a shared path has been built on member states' different histories, experiences, references and symbols. The result is a European Union whose supranational content is common to the citizens of all its member states. That leads us to the question of whether or not we Europeans yet have shared political affiliations. It's an ongoing quest and a vitally important one because it's the only way the nations of Europe can remain authors of their own identities while avoiding conflict with the identities of others.

Public debate is the key to creating shared political affiliations. It can clarify which aspects of diversity are in need of protection, and it can help determine how that protection can be achieved. Debate can thus be a motivating force that creates common expectations, makes our shared interests more apparent and helps to further shape Europe's collective identity.

Economic and Monetary Union offers a good example of how our success in resolving the problems that surrounded the common currency created a broader

awareness of many other issues relating to the currency. There is now a likely Europe-wide debate on whether the euro contributes to inflation, whether its high value puts European exports at risk and whether the interest rates set by the European Central Bank are facilitating home-buyers. All of which goes to show that a forum for debate emerges automatically when a common policy exists and issues arise, that are of concern to the public.

The example of the euro also underlines that progress towards a more democratic and united Europe does not result from grand plans for the future, but rather from specific solutions to common issues. EMU and the Schengen Agreement, coupled with the common foreign and defence policies identified in the new treaty, are mapping out new ways to respect and transcend national identities. They are initiatives that ensure union in diversity, and they also generate a European public forum. Such joint efforts, consciously fostered by the European Union, will gradually weave a unifying web carrying the integration project further forward. 7n

The degree to which we Europeans can maintain our diversity will depend on the progress we make towards greater unification, the creation of a European public forum and the deepening of our democracy. The relationship between the supranational and the national can be developed creatively so long as our joint efforts tackle real problems of concern to Europe's citizens. And that in turn is why the Lisbon treaty is such an important next step; it would allow the Union to become more effective, both by giving it the means to deal with its existing problems, and by promoting the sort of common endeavours that will enable us to progress further in the years ahead.

Constantine Simitis is a former Prime Minister of Greece and member of the Action Committee on European Democracy (ACED). csimitis@otenet.gr

END