

Double Miscalculation¹

Ognyan Minchev

The explicit French “no” to the European constitution will not have dramatic effects on the European Union as an institutional configuration. The Union will continue to function on the legal base of the Nice Treaty that - though considered being clumsy and ineffective as an institutional design - is the lowest possible common denominator of the united Europe of 27 members (including Bulgaria and Romania). The political earthquake – as the results of the French vote have been defined – refers primarily to the deeper and more substantive base of the European project and, first of all, to the conflicting discrepancy between the goals and interests of the European elite and those of the European citizens.

The administrative and political utopia of the European elite has diverged from the agenda of the ordinary European citizen in two major directions – the future of welfare state and the project for a “multicultural” Europe. For Europe, the welfare state is not only a mechanism for national income redistribution in favor of the poorer people and to the detriment of the richer ones, as some homebred “free market” ideologists claim. The welfare state is a mechanism for democratic institutional control over the results of the market mechanism. The absence of such control provides for the transformation of the market from a tool for increasing civilization’s welfare into an oligarchic plot for robbing society under the “law of the jungle”. The welfare state creates the infrastructure of solidarity within the national community and makes possible the existence of national and community strategies for economic, cultural and social development.

When left on its own, without the democratic institutional control of the social state, the market is reduced to perverted models of primitive capitalism as the ‘Saxe-Coburggotski’ model in Bulgaria and the ‘Sofianski’ model in Sofia. In Bulgaria, the market functions as a plot of a handful of empowered scoundrels who take advantage of the resources of power to rob the society. The ideological instruments applied – left-wing or right-wing - are of little importance. It does not matter whether the oligarchic link will be reproduced through the magic formula of “privatization by all means” or through slobbery promises for increasing social welfare as a cover for large-scale political and bureaucratic frauds. The result is one and the same: society does not dispose of a real instrument for control over the decisions making in the field of economy and income distribution.

The majority of French citizens that voted against the constitution as well as other Europeans are afraid precisely of losing their control over the economic and social decisions that the new European elites would make in the new Brussels power configuration. The civic control over the government in Paris and London is a well-established civic practice for centuries. Elevating – and diluting – the decision-making

¹ An abridged version of this article was published in the “Trud” Daily on June 1, 2005.

process to a continental level into Brussels administrative labyrinths will challenge this democratic civic mechanism. Only the Eastern Europeans (to be more precise - only part of them) are ready to lose their civic freedom of control over national decisions. Anyway, presently they do not control their national economic and political oligarchies. Hence, they prefer the authority of Brussels to the disgraceful acts of the authorities in Sofia or Bucharest. The democratic freedoms of the Western Europeans were attained through hard-won battles in the last two centuries. The Western Europeans will not give way until they receive enough guarantees that their freedoms will be preserved in the transition from national to European political governance. For the present, such guarantees do not exist. Therefore, significant part of the Left voted 'no' in defense of the social system and the nationalist Right also voted 'no' in defense of the decision-making national sovereignty.

The project for a 'multicultural Europe' is the second area where the positions of the French and the European elite and of the European citizens dramatically diverge. With the European constitution coming into force, Brussels is seeping off from the national institutions the decision-making sovereignty in the field of immigration policy and EU enlargement policy. Millions of Muslims from the Maghreb and the Middle East create serious problems not only for the labor market in France, Germany and the Netherlands. With their unwillingness to integrate into the host societies, they have proved to be a long-term problem. This unwillingness has reached the scale of public arrogance with the assassination of the art director Van Gogh who "dared" criticize Islamism in the Netherlands, with the explicit threat that in 10 years the large Dutch cities will be dominated by an effective Muslim majority, with the transformation of the Islamic communities into organized crime ghettos and into collective clients of the welfare safety net. There are plenty of similar examples. Against this background, the EU decision on starting accession negotiations with Turkey has been perceived as an expression of disregard of public opinion by the governing European politicians. There is hardly a reasonable European citizen that underestimates the importance of a democratic Turkey – a friend of the West. But few people would like to see new millions of Turks at the labor market and in the streets of Europe as a result of Ankara's EU membership, cunningly imposed by Brussels.

By analogy, the apprehension of Turkey's EU membership spreads over the forthcoming integration of Bulgaria and Romania. Not only the sizable Roma minorities, but also the general unsatisfactory level of economic development, the institutional shortages of the judicial system and the problems posed by organized crime make the membership of our two countries, with their "small problems", appear in the eyes of the average European *per se* as setting ajar the "back door" to a forthcoming membership of Turkey with its big problems. For Bulgaria, it is critical to prevent the political crisis of the European project (which is inevitable after the vote in Paris) from preoccupation with the Bulgarian membership as an eventual problem of the European Union. In order to avoid the coming into force of the protective clause and the one-year delay in its membership, Bulgaria should implement all institutional commitments it has undertaken. If we fail to do that, we have only ourselves to blame.