

# Merkel attempts to wake Europe from its slumber

by Renato Ruggiero

*The report that the European Commission presented to Heads of State and Government recently was a disappointing one. European citizens' opinions on the hypotheses of further enlargement and concrete Community policies are of particular concern. There are however those, like Angela Merkel, who try to react to this pessimism*

A year has now passed since the heads of States and governments of the 25 member countries of the European Union acknowledged the negative votes on the European Constitution project in France and Holland and decided to take some time to reflect. An initial assessment of this period of reflection, which should have involved the populations of all the member States, the representatives of the civil society and institutions, will be ready in the middle of June this year, according to the calendar set by the heads of States and governments.

The first document, which will be submitted to the Summit in mid-June, is a communication of the Commission to the European Council on the results of this reflection.

It seems difficult to give a positive judgement on this first stage. The vast debate, which should have involved the populations and institutions of the 25 countries, does not appear to have been on a scale in any way sufficient. In the report the Commission states that those citizens who took part showed "poor knowledge and interest in the way the European institutions work. At the same time they hold high expectations" of the ability of the European Union to formulate important policies.

European citizens questioned, generally had a pessimistic view of the future, dominated by worries about economic and social issues. Unemployment, especially among young people, is at the centre of concerns. Also, the impact of globalization on employment, social protection and prosperity is viewed negatively. At the same time, within the 25 members of the European Union, freedom of workers' movement would appear to be a sensitive subject in almost all the member States.

The language barrier also ranks highly among people's concerns in the debate. Most of the participants believe that a second common language is necessary for all citizens of the EU.

Enlargement certainly constitutes one of the main subjects of the discussion. If, on average, 55% of Europeans consider enlargement positively, 63% are afraid that further enlargement would increase the difficulties of the national employment markets.

Finally, along with high expectations from community initiatives, citizens who took part in the debate tended to think of "institutional questions as abstract and complex", showing a lot of interest in policies that affect their daily activities positively, especially work, the environment and energy.





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sector of security and justice, the Commission will present a report on police cooperation and judicial cooperation, which also includes legal immigration. Also in the field of enlargement, the Commission undertakes to prepare a report, before the European Council meets in December, on the enlargement strategy and, finally, it announced a document on strengthening external relations, using current treaties. The Commission will send all these documents directly to the National Parliaments, asking for their opinions.

These announcements, proposals or reports by the Commission should be able to “produce results for Europe” by using the current treaties and institutions to better effect. “At the same time, the Commission suggests the European Council must decide in June to adopt a gradual approach for the new presidency with the aim of creating conditions for the implementation of future institutional regulations”.

The Commission also predicts a political declaration that reaffirms the values and ambitions of Europe for the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which will take place in Italy next year. Objectively the document of the Commission seems like an exercise in rhetoric with the enumeration of problems and objectives without any solid indication on how it is possible to create such a program in the absence of overcoming the current community political and institutional crisis.

The content of two political speeches on the future of Europe

The second document that will be presented by the Commission to the European Council in June focuses on the need for Europe to produce results. Nevertheless, the Commission lists a series of indicators, undoubtedly valid, but does not state in which way this program can be created in the current political and institutional crisis. In other words, one gets the impression of being faced with an agenda full of good intentions but not a realistic political program.

The first point treated in a chapter entitled “The Europe of results” concerns a boost in economic integration: a single market for the twenty first century. In this context the Commission undertakes to abolish the remaining obstacles to the creation of a single market and to this end re-examine the situation to determine what is still to be done, and how to do it. Next year, the Commission will present a report on this point with the commitment to actively favour the Lisbon Strategy and the operation of the Economic and Monetary Union.

Still on the subject of documents that the Commission undertakes to present next year, there is the announcement of a detailed statement on “European society”. The Commission intends to launch a program in favour of participation and solidarity. In other words, a social dimension re-examined in parallel with the single market. In the

made by Mrs. Merkel in Berlin at the beginning of May is very different. That institutional compromises passed by the European Council in Nice and which today regulate the operation of the Union "are not sufficient. This is certain", refuting the statements of the Commission on the possibility of progressing with the current treaties. She added: "institutional reforms are necessary for a very practical reason: if they are not approved, if we do not reform the present order, the Union will not improve its capacity to act" sufficiently to meet the requests of citizens. Mrs. Merkel's words are a far cry from what the Commission proposes, even at a transitory stage. The German Chancellor goes much further than the Commission's analysis when she states that our task is "nothing more and nothing less than a re-foundation of Europe. I do not want to dramatize things, but I believe that a re-foundation is more necessary than ever".

At the centre of her speeches the German Chancellor raises the problem of overcoming the essential reason for constructing European unity, founded on peace, democracy and progress in the wake of the Second World War. Today, this reason continues to be a source of pride and success for those who built modern Europe, but it is no longer enough to motivate new generations who grew up with peace, freedom and progress. Mrs. Merkel adds that fresh motivation needs to be found for a Europe which can meet the current needs of its population: addressing subjects like work, social security and its ability to keep life-style in line with globalization.

It would be difficult to disagree with the German Chancellor. It is necessary to add that to ask Europe to demonstrate its ability to create this new vision you must also have the political courage to give it the means, not just financial, to meet these new targets.

In other words, it means making transfer of sovereignty possible, such as has happened to date, to create the common policies necessary for the well-being of citizens and the political unity of the Union.

The picture you get from the documents of the Commission and also from the speeches by Mrs. Merkel do not encourage us to think that the European council, by mid-June, may make progress in overcoming the current crisis.

The more probable hypothesis is a lengthening of the period of reflection while we wait for the French elections to be held towards the end of the first half of 2007, more or less a month before the next German presidency of the European Union Council.

Maybe this is the only calendar realistically possible in the hope that in the middle of 2007 a political and numerical agenda has been reached to put an end to this long and difficult institutional crisis.



\_Following the rejection of the European Constitution in the French and Dutch referendums, a period of reflection began and has produced a memo from the Commission to the EU Council to be discussed at the summit meeting in mid-June