



by Giovanni Moro

EDITORIAL

**W**hen reading the comments made immediately after the deadly blow delivered by the French and the Dutch to the project of a constitutional treaty, the issue concerning the relationship between European institutions and citizens emerges as one of the very few elements of certainty and large consensus. I realize that this statement concerning the referendum does not hold much ground; but in a case like this, looking at things more closely can be useful.

The hidden side of the question lies in that the idea of giving Europe a constitution arises from the desire to reduce the gap between citizens and community institutions, at least partly making up the “democratic deficit” of the Union. It was a sensible project, as it addressed an objective condition of contemporary national democracies, characterized by the representation crisis of political systems and less leadership legitimatization, a deficit in state efficacy, the concomitance of globalization and localization, the multiplication of identity and belonging principles of individuals in society. The European Union is not the cause of all of this, like Euro skeptics say knowing that they are lying, but it is an attempt to respond to this; maybe the only attempt that so far has made decent headway. One cannot ignore that the European Union, though being constitutively a market and therefore being a non standard political institution, has: introduced the first transnational citizenship in the contemporary world, spread regulations and a culture of consumer rights adjusting legislation and national customs accordingly, assumed the responsibility of defending fundamental rights within its territory, recognized non government organizations as partners



political, left-wing and right-wing) has not changed its ambiguous attitude – “Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde” style – towards citizens, who are considered and treated at the same time with trust and suspicion, as a resource or a danger, as a necessary partner but also as low skilled people. This behavior was reflected in many basic choices, such as the method and content of the constitution project. Speaking of basic choices, I would like to mention the refusal (since the time of the Nice intergovernmental conference) of the proposal by civic groups and movements to establish, before beginning to draw up the agreement, that the results obtained would be subject to a single referendum, thereby producing a text where citizens were the main parties. This refusal has triggered a typical vicious circle: those who don't trust, are distrusted. With regard to the work method, except for rare occasions, the Convention and the institutions of the Union have not considered or practiced the consultation of the civil European society as a crucial task. Examples include the telematic forum on Europe's future, where everybody was invited to take a position and make proposals to which nobody answered; the lack of a procedure to question proposals and remarks has led to privileging informal relationships and a few organized subjects of the Brussels establishment; a couple of plethoric meetings of communication between the Convention and the “civil society”, consisted of anything but dialogue.

The same contents of the constitutional treaty with regard to the statute, role and powers of citizens in the life of the Union, finally, were defined more out of the concern to reassure institutions and parties about their supremacy rather than create efficient instruments and procedures for citizens to exercise their powers and responsibilities. The result was a few confused articles of the treaty which provide for forms of dialogue and collaboration among

institutions and non government organizations at levels that are far below consolidated practices. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the project of constitution was treated as a foreign body by voters in the two founding countries of the EU.

These circumstances should be taken into account when deciding what to do to overcome the *impasse*. Since citizens have shown that they can be an insurmountable stumbling block, it is necessary to start again with them in building the Union. It is important that this is performed sincerely and that commitment is high, avoiding oversimplifying the issue for example by talking about a communication deficit. This could easily have a similar outcome to the pompous “Citizens First” program, promoted by the Commission of Jacques Santer when in power: a series of attractive advertisements, very visible but only in the underground system in Brussels. —