



Europe needs to keep its promises

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Attempting to build a new Europe without providing people with sufficient explanations has a price: the French and Dutch "No" to the draft European Constitution. Failing to place our trust in the Western values and principles that define the European identity has a price: the distrust of all Europeans. Filling people's heads with speeches imbued with suspicion towards the United States and a sense of distrust with regard to economic reform and the free market, also has a price: people's trust and confidence is eroded even further. What is more, who can really trust in a European Council that constantly changes its opinion?

An extensive majority of the French have voted against a Constitution that was tailor-made for them. An even larger majority of the Dutch have rejected a draft Constitution that is not especially prejudicial to their interests. The easy way out of this situation would be to appeal to a conven-

tional faith in Europe and attempt to find a trick with which to force Europeans to accept something they have just rejected. But this is not a true pro-European stance. It is just the easy way forward, which is very different.

A real debate took place in France concerning the European Constitution. This is the very least we can expect from a democracy, and the French nation must be congratulated for it. However, the outcome of this debate is not especially enlightening. It is surprising to observe how the advocates of both the "No" and "Yes" votes employed very similar arguments. Both campaigns focused on encouraging voters to turn against the United States and to reject what was called "the Anglo-Saxon threat". Advocates on both sides proposed a Europe without reforms, featuring a more restricted market and greater State control (in a country in which the public sector plays a very

significant role). And this happens now, just when we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Europe by British and American troops, an event that ushered in the longest period of prosperity and peace Europe has known, founded on political freedoms and the market economy. Paradoxical, certainly.

It is not surprising, however, that the debate has strayed so far from the boundaries of the true European identity. Over the last few years, certain leaders have fertilized the populist seeds of rejection regarding reform and the Atlantic link. It is not surprising, therefore, that weeds have sprung up and the gardeners have lost control of them.

The constantly changing criteria of some leaders who have courted populism do not inspire confidence. In the nineteen-nineties a Stability Pact was agreed to handle times of crisis. When the crisis arrived, the immediate response was to abolish the Pact. In the year 2000 an Agenda for Reform was also agreed, which has now been rapidly dropped in order not to have to deal with the problem of the atavistic inflexibility of certain sections of French and German society. These two great countries were the ones that sponsored the Treaty of Nice, whose aim was to clear the path towards a reunified Europe. And just when Europe has been reunified and its institutions are operating smoothly, there is an attempt to annul the Nice Treaty and establish a new distribution of power that is as unjustified as it is mistaken. Distrust is the result. The risk is that all the good aspects of the European Union will suffer the consequences of a leadership that is not only lacking, but also erratic and mistaken. This is especially the case when this leadership presumes to become the only voice of all Europeans.

The current situation is not easy, but it is not impossible either. The idea of continuing the process of ratifying the Constitution in the remaining European countries seems somewhat eccentric to me. I do not believe that the votes of the rest will help us to forget the French and Dutch "No". Neither do I believe it is a good idea to rework the text and present it again to the French people in a referendum. This would represent a considerable lack of respect for democracy. What is more, we must bear in mind that there is more than one cause behind the French rejection, which means that it cannot be avoided through tricks and machinations.

The idea of extracting certain chapters from the Constitution in order to ensure their approval by European Governments seems an even worse approach. It would be especially grave if the advocates of this idea sought to modify the distribution of power within the European Council in this manner. Various national leaders have stated that they will reject any changes on these terms, and they have very good reasons for doing so.

Perhaps the best solution would be to do something new. And it really would be new if Europe fulfilled what it has already agreed. This is precisely what the EU has not yet attempted to do. It should comply with the Treaty of Nice, fulfill the Stability Pact, implement the Lisbon Agenda and strengthen the Alliance with the United States. Frivolity is not a feature of the European identity, and defeatism and distrust are not typical characteristics either. The truly European approach would be to confront our problems once and for all and to get down to work, in the company of friends who continue to protect and support us.