



## VISIONS FOR EUROPE<sup>1</sup>

*In progress*

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Many commentators of the fiftieth anniversary of Europe are indulging in anniversary style debates. Is the sum total of the cost benefit analysis after fifty years a positive one? Is Europe suffering a mid life crisis like some movie stars approaching a really difficult turn in their life? Or, on the contrary, should we consider the crisis, if any, just a growth crisis, like the one that adolescents experience? And what will Europe look like in fifty years time?

I believe that if we want to use the energy of the anniversary to help us in our daily routines, we also want to be more pragmatic and understand what has to be done – here and now – to reignite the dream. It may be useful to put forward six points that look to me to be rather obvious and yet which seem too often ignored.

1. **There is no doubt that the EU has been one of the greatest political success stories of all time and as such continues to play an essential role into the worldwide search for political responses to globalization.**

Never before in history have so many countries **voluntarily** surrendered increasing portions of their sovereignty and such a result is even more remarkable if one considers that this has happened in the very birth place of nationalism and of the concept of Nation States. This outstanding result has been essential to achieving **peace** for fifty years and once again it is impressive that such an outcome was ensured in the area that had engaged in wars on a worldwide scale just few years prior to the Community's birth.

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Nobody denies that Europe has achieved a lot, and the never ending **queue** of new membership seekers attests to it.

I may in fact also add that the Europe Union is also an unique institutional innovation: a **genial alternative to the concept of State Nations** and we should have long ago given up our useless, albeit at times amusing, debate on notions such as the “United States of Europe”. Europe is not a state and it will never (hopefully) be one precisely because it was born beyond the ideological limits of a state. It is an original power-sharing arrangement, whose institutions are not allocated power for an unlimited period of time like in an Hegelian, eighteenth century leviathan; whose unstable, sometimes even uncertain decision making allocations are both the most criticized and its most modern feature.

It is also the most serious, at least the most articulated attempt at the decision making processes on an international scale that provides some answers to the challenge of globalization and, as such, an experiment that needs to be taken forward. An example that, in fact, other macro regions (the Latin America Mercosur for instance, the significantly named African Union, the Asean) consider to be a benchmark.

**2. It is the very acknowledgement of its role that imposes on us the duty to not downplay its current crisis.**

It is for these very considerations - for the realization of how great the benefits have been to the European citizens, of the continuing demand for membership that countries on Union borders continue to express, and of the importance of the experiment as the only attempt to govern globalization - that we can not ignore the magnitude of the crisis that Europe has gone through in the last years.

Europe has recently recorded failures on each of the three main performance criteria it is normally evaluated on.

On the **institutional** front it is dangerous to minimize the referenda fiasco of two years ago which is even more remarkable considering that the countries who refused the treaty were among two of the six founding member states: it is a circumstance that disposes brutally of the core versus periphery double speeds integration theory that is still unexplainably being circulated. On the **economic** front we all know that the years of the heavily trumpeted Lisbon strategy have witnessed Europe as consistently almost the slowest macro region of the world in terms of economic growth; not only if somebody sees China and India competing on the cost factors, the growth of R&D expenses and the number of engineers graduating every year is enough to cast huge doubts also to any residual advantage in terms of knowledge.

Finally on the **enlargement**, yes countries are continuing to queue and yet they seem to loose enthusiasm as soon as they join the club, as - notwithstanding the huge funds they had just received - the turnover and the share of the votes of the euro sceptical parties in Poland and Hungary demonstrated at the first EP

elections they joined immediately after the enlargement<sup>2</sup>. Neither ideals nor money (in the form of the structural funds) seem to be buying euro enthusiasm any more and, even worse, since the enlargement was a success both in terms of demand (people were asking to come) and supply (it used to show that citizens of the union had a remarkable attitude towards the “other” that, for instance, in America does not exist), it is on the supply side, on the openness that Europeans display that we have some of the biggest problems (leaving alone the attitude of the French public opinions towards Turkey that still have to find any rational explanation).

### 3. It is a stupid democracy.

But **what comes first** of the three problems that we are having? The failure to reform the decision making and participation processes? The lack of economic growth and the slowing pace of market reforms? Or the growing sense of uneasiness with people that from the border are asking to enter and amongst European people themselves? Where should we start from?

Most of European politicians may ecumenically answer that we should act on each of the three fronts simultaneously; others would academically argue that the problem, as usual, is a “cultural” one; and there are also the ones that more or less hieratically repeat that what Europe lacks is leadership and vision. There is some truth in each of these answers and yet none of them can help to get any concrete political decisions about the future of Europe. We may wish to act simultaneously but this strategy is also the most costly one because it risks to dilute the limited resources we can count on. We can concede that all problems are cultural, and yet we do not have the time to wait for cultural processes to materialize. It is true that Europe lacks leadership and vision and still we do not see these things emerging as the outcome of a deliberate political process.

### 4. The EU crisis is parallel to the national politics ones.

When we evaluate the present status of the Union we tend to ignore such a simple reality: **if Europe is not feeling well, the nation states** that many still seem to consider its alternative – **are not doing any better**.

People feel less represented everywhere and if, for instance, the British point to the unstoppable decline of turn over participation to the European parliament election as one of the most evident signs of the crisis of the super national institution, the reverse can be said for the participation in the general election in the UK where the winning party’s share of the potential voters has fallen during the last years<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> As for Vision position paper on “The hot summer of the Union” released on July 2004, immediately after the last EU parliament elections and accessible at [http://visionforum.it/forum\\_en/il\\_giornale\\_di\\_vision/PPaperEN.php](http://visionforum.it/forum_en/il_giornale_di_vision/PPaperEN.php)

<sup>3</sup> As for Vision position paper on the “democracy of the future” accessible at [http://visionforum.it/forum\\_en/globalizzazione\\_e\\_democrazia\\_en/il\\_futuro\\_della\\_democrazia\\_en/Democrazia\\_PPaper\\_ING\\_may2006\\_breve.pdf](http://visionforum.it/forum_en/globalizzazione_e_democrazia_en/il_futuro_della_democrazia_en/Democrazia_PPaper_ING_may2006_breve.pdf)

What is probably even more meaningful is the sharp increase over time (from 38% in the seventies to 81% in the last five years according to Vision<sup>4</sup>) by which the ruling party or coalition gets defeated at the national general election (even in the Nordic countries that are by many considered a happy case): whoever tries to govern a complex, European society is having a hard time. Both at international and national levels. And if the dream of the international governance is not taking off, the reality of national politics suffer paradoxically of the same problem: diminution in the capability to represent, reduction in the ability to deliver, in many cases, decreased sense of belonging to the same community and multiplication of centrifugal forces of various types.

**5. The issue of the constitutional treaty is central and yet we can not address it if we do not recognize that both drafting process and end product were way below expectations.**

We can not continue to say that the Dutch and the French said no to Europe because of selfishness or ignorance. It is – frankly speaking – both offensive and a manipulation of the answer that those people gave to a specific question. And it is not democratic as not very “democratic” were the mechanisms by which the treaty was drafted and the end product that we got.

We can not continue to conceive the change process of an institution as an entirely internal, incremental, **organic matter**<sup>5</sup>. We can not hope to have a constitution (or even a constitutional treaty) without capturing into the constitution making processes the wills of the citizens (otherwise constitution is not any more that kind of high level “social contract” that dictionaries tend to associate with “constitutions”, in fact). And, eventually and more importantly, you (you as the European political elite) can not continue with this huge assumption that efficiency of government (“Europe talking with one voice”) is something that comes first and actually is in trade off with its representation. Unless we decide to ignore - as even the generations with historical memory seem to do – that democracy has historically won its war against dictatorship for the very reason of being not only more respectful of people wills but also more capable to deliver wellbeing and better distribute it.

The convention and its product failed not because the French suddenly understood that they had to stop the Polish plumbers or because the Dutch discovered they were afraid of the Muslims, but because it was based on a couple of assumptions that are the pillars of an approach that has yielded at times many great results and that lately, with the aging of its champions, have only become cynical and ineffective.

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<sup>4</sup> As for Vision position paper on the “democracy of the future” accessible at [http://visionforum.it/forum\\_en/globalizzazione\\_e\\_democrazia\\_en/il\\_futuro\\_della\\_democrazia\\_en/Democrazia\\_PPaper\\_ING\\_may2006\\_breve.pdf](http://visionforum.it/forum_en/globalizzazione_e_democrazia_en/il_futuro_della_democrazia_en/Democrazia_PPaper_ING_may2006_breve.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> And the same applies to the many other failed institutional reforms from the United Nations one – as for the Vision project on TransformUn accessible at [http://visionforum.it/filedascaricare/articoliUN/TransformUN\\_Nov22nd6new.pdf](http://visionforum.it/filedascaricare/articoliUN/TransformUN_Nov22nd6new.pdf) - to the attempts that in countries as different as Italy and UK have been tried in the last fifteen years.

If the Laeken declaration properly defined the nature of the problem (mentioning twice among its seven supreme political targets “resolving the EU’s democratic deficit and achieving more democracy, transparency and efficiency; and “bringing the EU closer to its citizens”) the constitutional treaty decided that within 450 pages there could be no space for concrete instruments to foster political participation<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> But for the meagre provisions of articles 45 and 46 as for the collection released by Vision in May, 2005 and the paper on “The day after the referendum fiasco” accessible at [http://www.visionforum.it/filedascaricare/pp\\_referendum\\_sbefdi06.zip](http://www.visionforum.it/filedascaricare/pp_referendum_sbefdi06.zip)

It is rather obvious that two of the populations that in the world are most keen on the idea that power is ultimately in the people's hands decided that the time had come to punish this system.

It was also, in fact, the final defeat of a glorious elite (present and former presidents and prime ministers, diplomats and professors of law) that has had lots of merits but to which we now should ask the last effort to dedicate their moral stance to promote the emergence of a new breed of leaders, equipped with different intellectual instruments.

## **6. Demos and democracy.**

I believe that we have to start from the creation of specific instruments that will explicitly have the objective to consolidate a true European political arena, and therefore a true European public opinion participating in a European wide debate on the future of the Union having meaningful, decisive impact on the most high level decisions that need to be taken.

Another miserable show like the one displayed by the latest European Parliament elections reduced to the sum of national referenda in favour or against the national governments<sup>7</sup> can really be the ultimate political suicide of the only vision that succeeded in becoming a political reality in the last fifty years.

Once we succeed in giving to the probably most sophisticated public opinions of the world, the idea that they can count, it will be easier to have majority votes on issues like foreign policies; and likewise it will be more doable to go ahead with European led market reforms that may change the rules in favour of other people, countries that citizens will not perceive as aliens.

It is not a question of generically making European citizens closer to European institutions; and it is not about launching another communication initiative with a few hundred young people coming to Brussels or Strasbourg to clap; and it is not about broadly filling the still vast democratic gap we have been discussing so many times.

Likewise, it is not about creating some generic European demos, because we will have to recognize that such an ambitious project must be undertaken starting with the segments (probably the more mobile, younger, progressive ones) that are readier to be engaged into a processes of European political participation.

It is about having specific incentives for the European Parliamentary elections to be on European issues, about having the tools for encouraging the national political parties to assume an European dimension: for instance an idea could

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<sup>7</sup> This was sadly true in some countries like Italy at the latest EP election as for the Vision paper "The hot summer for the Union" released on July 2004, immediately after the last EU parliament elections and accessible at [http://visionforum.it/forum\\_en/il\\_giornale\\_di\\_vision/PPaperEN.php](http://visionforum.it/forum_en/il_giornale_di_vision/PPaperEN.php)

be to give **an incentive to the party that succeeds MEPs to be elected in countries other than the one of their nationality.**

It is about continuing and multiplying every opportunity we may already have (like the Erasmus project) to make European students get together: one of the most urgent things would be, for instance, to fund (with part of CAP money for instance) **the introduction in high schools and universities curricula of a mandatory semester to be spent in another EU nation.**

So lets start from a much more slender version of the treaty. Lets introduce in these procedures to exercise democracy some innovations that national legacies make so difficult in the nation states.

Constituencies not necessarily based on geography; elections by policies; e-voting enabled consultations with timings and scopes broader than the traditional ones are amongst the developments of the “democracy of the future” that nation states have no time any more to consider and that Europe may pioneer. Why, for instance, do we not allow whoever declares to want it, the possibility to vote through the internet in a European wide constituency? Why should we not recognize that society is not only based on territory, and that a natural consequence of globalization is to also have communities constructed on different types of common interests?

And also very important, please European politicians do not make the mistake to simply cook something and make the equally not-in-good-health national parliaments approve them.

A referendum for anything which has some “institutional” objective is necessary unless we have decided to forget the basic lesson of democracy: that if we ignore society, society will sooner or later fireback. It is absolutely essential **a Europe wide referendum** (there are legal technicalities to be solved but it is possible) so that the treaty will be approved by Europe wide majority and on the basis of a debate among citizens that desperately needs to be at European level<sup>8</sup>.

It should be about making European citizens closer to the institutions and closer amongst them. This should be the priority. And it is really strange that there are so many that ignore that even the competitiveness agenda completely depends on this thing to materialize. Without a sense of community there will always be people that will oppose reforms that may damage their back yard. And similarly if those reforms fail to incorporate the preferences of the individuals that are affected (as it should happen in a democracy), they will be systematically refused. Even beyond their concrete merit.

If we can not have taxation without representation, we can not even have changes that may affect people’s life. And similar principle may apply to enlargement where loose communities may less happily accept to be enlarged

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<sup>8</sup> The likely outcome of having the treaty approved with the majorities of votes in some but not all countries would be, in itself, an historical achievement. Such an outcome would in fact be, in many ways, the institutional birth of a Europe of peoples approving something ( in fact its fundamental law) as people and as European and not as sum of countries (of whose some may not be in favour).

with groups of people that share some common feeling constructed through some political confrontation and sharing.

It is a question of democracy, but it is also a question of finding a new method and a new leadership. Recognizing the merits that the old ones have had, but also the absolute need of a discontinuity.

This is why Vision is launching “Visions for Europe”: to verify how powerfully seven different, possible “visions” can work as a motivator for European citizens and as a test field for a new method and a generation of new leaders to take over. The project will span a two year period and will touch down in diverse capital cities: Istanbul, Budapest, Lisbon, Jerusalem, Bucharest and Washington DC. It will start from the very city where the vision became a treaty fifty years ago. In fact, the 18<sup>th</sup> of May at the Italian Parliament the first of the seven events will investigate if it is the prospective to exit a fossil based economy the mission impossible that will give energy to Europe for the next fifty years.

For us, for Vision, for the generation of which we are a representation, this is the opportunity to make clear that we have the wills and the skills to take the dream in our hands.