

'Deadlock and posturing' from Le Figaro (17 December 2004)

Caption: On 17 December 2004, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro warns the countries of the European Union against the temptation of enlargement of the European Union to include the countries in the Balkans.

Source: Le Figaro. 17.12.2004. Paris. "Impasse et impostures", auteur:Gallo, Max , p. 11.

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Should we fear a Balkanisation of Europe?

Deadlock and posturing

BY MAX GALLO

The death of the European Union will be a triumph! The events of the last few weeks proclaim the joyful demise of the plan for a united, powerful, European Europe, with an independent foreign policy, defence system and currency, while the Brussels Summit on Turkey comes to an end today ...

In France, the 'yes' vote on the Constitutional Treaty has been victorious on all fronts, starting with the media, without which no other victory is possible. Sarkozy has been crowned the greatest fighter for the 'yes' vote. Hollande — says the press — has brought off a famous victory. And noting that 56 000 socialist activists — as against 41 000 — had voted 'yes', the proclamation went out that 'future generations' had been saved! President Chirac, Bayrou, Giscard d'Estaing, all of them applauded the 'triumph of reason', the 'rejection of a step into the unknown'. So all the tens of millions of French voters now have to do is follow the lead of their vanguard: elites, elected representatives, militants, possibly — at a generous estimate — 150 000 people, although it is true that the numbers are inflated by the media. And Hollande is already claiming that he voted 'yes' first, that the 'yes' will be a socialist 'yes'. The others point out that they were at the front of the procession, triumphant, and that the 'yes' will be a liberal one. The people have to follow.

Forget that April of 2002, when the leaders of the governing parties — Chirac, Jospin — only managed to rally less than 40 % of the electorate! A bad memory. All that is left are a few extremists, marginal cases, old fogeys, adventurers waving the banners for a 'no' vote. Poor old Fabius, with his ambitions! Because of course the others are not ambitious at all!

Let us leave this theatre. On this stage of make-believe, Europe goes from triumph to triumph! It pours out regulations and directives. It has more and more members of parliament, making sure that they have more and more power. They declare war on Buttiglione the Catholic. Victory, triumph! That Europe is going from strength to strength. There is only one thing wrong with it: it is floating in the air, a virtual Europe, above the actual Europe.

So the euro is doing better than the dollar (1.34 dollars to the euro)? But that's a defeat! It is the kind of thing that will whittle down our already feeble growth rate. And there's expected to be a further fall in the US currency. Goodbye exports! And yet this little figure of 1.34 will have a greater impact on 'future generations' than the Socialist Party's 56 000 'yes' votes. What are we doing? Nothing! What can we do — it's all being decided elsewhere!

So, relocations, unemployment — already 10 % — de-industrialisation, households in a state of anxiety — and hence falling consumption — these are the practical realities of Europe. What's more, the Commission — while the media go into raptures over the socialists' famous victories — is preparing to issue a directive on services. It will let the professions and service companies operate in every country of the Union while keeping the regulations — wages and charges, tax arrangements, working hours, etc. — of the countries of origin. Which is to say small and medium-sized businesses in Western Europe are in for a shake-up. Polish transport companies are already arriving, with prices at least 50 % lower. Next along will be architects, doctors and so on. Expect bankruptcies and unemployment.

Soon the Romanians, Bulgarians and Turks will be joining the Poles. Naturally. It may even be fair. But how are the people — millions of them — who will be hit by these influxes going to react? Try to imagine these social problems being exacerbated by what are always difficult relations between communities of different origins, with different religions and cultural traditions. Who is bringing up these major issues? Who is talking about the 'declining populations' that Europe represents? Are there any historians who don't know that 'vacuums' attract? What makes this situation even more worrying is the existence of radical Islamism. These are the facts we should keep in mind when we examine the question of Europe's 'borders', the question of Turkey joining the Union. But who wants to upset the euphoria which reigns in virtual Europe

(institutions, dreams, utopias, lies, illusions, petty political calculations) and take the risk of being pilloried by the media? Everything thus conspires to exacerbate the blindness, the wilful refusal to see what Europe is actually like, sunk deep in crisis as it already is, incapable of giving a name to the vital issues which dog it and therefore of finding a solution to them.

And every day that passes deepens the divide between the virtual and the real. The medium-term forecast (a decade or two) is that Europe will certainly be a major economic area but a place which is steadily being Balkanised throughout, a land of communities which mistrust each other for social, ethnic and religious reasons. In a sense, the break-up of Yugoslavia will turn out to have been a barbaric and extreme prefiguring of the fate of this Europe which devours space and manufactures regulations and institutions with no grasp of reality. The European machine knows how to deconstruct the real world which actually exists, but it only manufactures what is virtual. All it does is set up markets which (because there is no common economic policy or harmonisation of tax and social security) accelerate the deconstruction. Only dreamers, word-spinners or liars can claim that that Union will be capable — with 25 members, or 30, and soon including Turkey! — of devising a common foreign policy and a common defence policy. At best, it will be one of the subsidiaries, more or less autonomous, of NATO.

Is this being pessimistic? Is it the bitterness of an old fogey, of someone who misses the good old days of the great French nation? It is merely anxiety in the face of the disruptions we can see coming, a sense of pre-programmed powerlessness to which a thousand signs point, and of which violence will no doubt be one facet: imported violence (the Madrid bombing of 11 March) but also violence which is internally generated (Islamist crime in the Netherlands, ETA, Corsica, border tensions, etc.).

Now there has never been any instance where, with such a gap between words and institutions on the one hand — the virtual, that is — and reality on the other, reality has not taken its revenge and, in a chaotic, brutal way, attempted, in disorder and often with violence, to narrow the gap. But how are we to forestall that moment, that probable outcome? The elites seem to be blind: Europe is the final Utopia, the last alibi, the last ideology which unites socialists and liberals, who are all — though with different conceptions of the self — praying to the same gods: the economy and globalisation. And when they are clear-sighted, our politicians dare not admit that where Europe is concerned they are stuck in the same deadlock. How can they go back on what they have said, on their promises?

This leads to two responses: a headlong rush forward; and the hysterical condemnation of anyone who utters doubts, raises queries, suggests taking a break or having a discussion. Hence that flood of invective poured onto the head of a moderate, very measured socialist who dared suggest voting ‘no’ to the Constitutional Treaty — a ‘no’ which they said would be a step into the unknown, a descent into chaos, the retreat of a chauvinist. The crisis is here, under our feet, before our eyes! But we prefer to celebrate the crowning of one person and the famous victory of another! And we talk about ‘the salvation of future generations’! So let us go on duping ourselves. Let us applaud all the victories to be won during the coming decade before they happen. Ten years after the famous victory at Austerlitz, however, comes Waterloo! But until that day comes, what a string of triumphs!