



Just vote and shut up!

By Natalia Kadenko

As a citizen of a democratic European state, you were born happily possessing the right to express your opinion by voting. Whether you came from the small Netherlands, or the somewhat bigger Germany, this system seemed to work with decent effectiveness, and people generally felt involved with and aware within their state.

The coming of the EU gave the population of its member states the opportunity to vote more often, both for the national and international governing bodies; but why has the voting percentage for the latter been declining ever since its introduction? Although desired otherwise by the EU idealists, people still see the national body as having legitimate power, rather than the European institutions “up there”. Those abstract

institutions hidden within glass buildings in Brussels are “eating” taxpayers’ money, producing unpopular laws like the rookverbod, and threatening to diminish Dutch tulip fields by forbidding the use of certain chemicals. No wonder that

No wonder that the Europeans are not associating themselves with those guys “up there”.

the Europeans are not associating themselves with those guys “up there”, and are not voting either. Another paradox is that the candidates balloting for EU institutions are usually not the most brilliant politicians, as are those who prefer to stay within the national borders. “*Hast du einem Opa, schick ihm nach Europa*” is true not only for Germany.

The *Opas*, however good their intentions might be, are creating an isolated political product, that corresponds with their vision of Europe rather than that of the European people. I get this impression as a geographical European, yet not an EU-citizen. It looks like all the deliberate calculations, aimed to give Luxembourg voting power compared to Germany, have failed to create the ties necessary for survival and development of the ambitious international political hybrid. European citizens feel isolated from the decision-making, and prefer to stay the citizens of their national states.

How did the political backbone of the EU lose connection with the European citizens? According to the concept of democracy, bigger power structures are by definition less democratic as every citizen has

less weight in representation. It was predictable that immense difficulties would occur when countries with varying contributions to the EU budgets and different understandings of the political processes in combination with the equal right

for its citizens to be represented merged. The Single European Act made the voting procedure more effective (some would say – at least, possible). Giving the Council of Ministers the right to decide by



majority vote instead of unanimity, meant that the opinion of the whole countries was further neglected. Naturally, the ministers are unsure whether they need to stand for their country of origin while trying to execute the vague “common European” policy – and many of them would choose to do so.

This brings us to the debate: is the concept of the European citizen contradicting that of a citizen of the national state? In a way, the answer is yes, as becoming a citizen of Europe means giving up some

of the rights that the citizens possess in the decision-making within their own state. This has turned out to be a stumbling block. The document-which-must-not-be-named, the European Constitution, will fix the dominance of European versus national, and, according to what we are witnessing, the nations are not ready for this step.

There is almost no single optimistic prognosis for the future of the EU that would not be criticized as idealistic. The reason might be that most of those prognoses include active participation of the citizens that are seen as politically aware, voting rationally rather than strategically, constructing the European project. This picture is very far from current reality, and few effective steps are taken to change that. Despite the fact that the traditional concept of that state is facing an enormous challenge, people prefer to stick to the usual and known state model; they hope that the current state of ongoing transition to the supranational model can be preserved eternally, preferably without much change to the habitual lifestyle.

The world financial crisis, combined with the crisis of the EU presidency, has further shaken the carefully built European colossus, still standing on the feet of clay. Let’s hope that the crisis will bring the awareness necessary to repair the gear of the colossus and make it walk towards the more stable and safe future. ■