



EU: LISBON IS NOT ENOUGH

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had invited the Twenty-seven several times to show bravery and responsibility, by finding a European George Washington to whom to entrust the post of stable EU President. The day after the Dublin's long-awaited Yes vote, which launched the race to the two prestigious Euro-posts provided by the Lisbon Treaty, not many French newspapers had given any credit to the hopes of the former President of the European Convention.

After having widely criticised the renewal of José Barroso's mandate at the head of the Commission, the leading newspapers had been hoping that an authoritative figure might be nominated to the EU Presidency: rather than looking for an unlikely George Washington, the references went above all to Jacques Delors, a figure capable of advancing the integration process, at the same time earning the trust of the main European leaders (François Mitterrand, Helmut Kohl but also Margaret Thatcher) (1).

1. A triumvirate of "featherweights" at the helm of the EU

Although the Twenty-seven had had all the time to get organised in view of this appointment, it soon seemed clear how, on the eve of the final rush for the nominations, the talks were proceeding in an extremely disorderly fashion. Even the public debate had seemed somewhat confused and uncertain in regard to the characteristics necessary for the future EU President: should it have been a strong personality? He should have been endowed with an undisputed international stature (see Blair) capable of earning credit in the eyes of Washington and Beijing or would it have rather have been better to have a sort of secretary general that limited his functions to those of mediator between Heads of State and Government?(2) In short, an improvisation took over and this is a factor that did not go unobserved, arousing from the pages of "Le Point" the disappointment of Giscard himself (3). The day after the appointments of the Belgian Herman van Rompuy and the British woman Catherine Ashton, the former to the post of stable President of the European Council, the latter to that of High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs, the judgements – whilst generally saving the two people directly involved, called a "discreet couple" (4) – we rather pitiless towards the European Heads of State and Government. The

appointment of Van Rompuy and Lady Ashton, have indeed represented the consecration of a technique of designation that for some years has dominated the EU scenarios: the choice of the minimum common denominator, the search for a profile that casts the least shadow over the Twenty-seven capitals, determined to adopt an increasingly inter-governmental policy.

If the game of the Euro-nominations has been judged to be respectful of the traditional dosage between the representatives of the "big" and the "small," of the old and the new Europe, between the conservatives leaders and the reformists, with an eye also to the gender balance, the puppeteers that have handled the whole issue almost single-handedly have been Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel. The Franco-German axis may have been the real inspirer of a choice (a downgraded one) that, associated with José Barroso's reconfirmation at Palace Berlaymont, preserves the role of Paris and Berlin in the management of European policy and diplomacy. If the choice of the "featherweight" Van Rompuy instead of the charismatic Blair (more liked by the French conservative press than the progressive press) has in itself been significant, the appointment of Catherine Ashton has really been paradoxical, to the extent that her country has been traditionally hostile to any hypothesis of European diplomacy (5). According to the most optimistic interpretations, the choice of Lady Ashton had been dictated – not only by an attention for the gender balance (6) – by the possibility, in a near future in which the United Kingdom might again find itself in the role as champion of Euro-scepticism, of seeing a British person countering the Conservative leader David Cameron from Brussels.

The new institutions born from the Lisbon Treaty had been welcomed as the chance to revive the EU after almost five years' stalemate, following the Franco-Dutch 'No' in 2005: it is clear, however, that Sarkozy and Merkel, with the choice of the Van Rompuy-Ashton-Barroso "triumvirate" were driven by the desire to make sure that the European destinies continued to be determined between Paris and Berlin, involving London every now and again. In this perspective, the French press substantially agreed on two points. The first is that if Van Rompuy – who seems to be the most authoritative figure of the triumvirate – should wish to define a credible profile for his post and turn out to be an effective European Council President, he will first of all have to emancipate himself from his two weighty godfathers (7).

The second is that the French Government seems to have taken its distance from the pro-European ambitions (which seemed to have driven it during the Presidency semester, in the second half of 2008) letting itself be progressively won over by the demands of *realpolitik*: by assuring for itself the portfolio of Internal Market and Financial Services of the Commission (attributed to Michel Barnier) and that of Secretary General of the Council, Paris has shown itself to be more determined in reaping the rewards of the talks with Berlin, than in maintaining its responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the European project (8).

2. The failure of Copenhagen

Almost paradoxically, starting from 1st December, day of the historic enforcement of the institutional Treaty that endows the 27-country EU with its first complete institutional structure, the debate in the French press has abandoned the issues relating to the new European architecture, to focus on the Copenhagen Conference, a great international appointment called upon to prolong and extend the environmental commitments set at Kyoto in 1997.

The agenda of the UN summit in Denmark, prepared at length by the EU, was particularly ambitious (9): set fair targets and binding measures for the greenhouse effect gas emissions, mobilising substantial resources to help the more underdeveloped countries, decide on control and monitoring mechanisms for the emissions at the international level (10).

At the end of the works, the press judgment was rather severe.

In actual fact, some positive signal did nevertheless emerge. In the first place, the interest aroused by the climate Conference in itself represents a mark of progress: the UN summit, which lasted 12 days, saw the participation of 193 countries, over 110 Heads of State and Prime Ministers, 45,000 accreditation applications (also causing serious logistic problems given the 15,000-seat capacity of the Bella Centre, summit venue), denoting a universal awareness of the risks of a development that neglects the environmental balance. In the second place, Copenhagen has confirmed that the USA are no longer insensitive to the issue of climate defence. With Obama at the White House, the United States have taken important steps forward in the fight on climate warming, until yesterday a taboo subject for the American administration. The delay built up by the US in respect to the Old Continent no doubt remains important, but Washington finds itself in a decisive phase: the legislative package addressed to

reducing Co2 emission had indeed been voted through by the House of Representatives but it is still grounded at the Senate. Obama's gesture of opening towards the Copenhagen conference (after having snubbed the celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Wall) has thus also been a message addressed to the American Senators. His presence at the summit, as has been seen, was not a guarantee of success, but it did represent a signal that nonetheless encouraging.

The general feeling is, however, one of failure (11). The final text does not reflect the main target that had been set for the conference; a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as compared with their level in 1990 by 2050 (according to the experts only this level of reduction would allow for planet warming to be contained within sustainable limits). The text is limited to recording the individual commitments of the countries to reducing greenhouse emission and with a certainty only as concerns the funds: 30 billion dollars in the three-year period 2010-2012 and 100 billion dollars per year by 2020. We are within the realm of declarations of good intentions, not before a precise and binding document. The text does not even hark back to the target of the World Organisation for Environmental Defence, given the task of guaranteeing the centralised control of emissions. If some isolated voice has held the EU not to blame for the disappointing outcome of the Conference, laying the blame for the failure first of all on the scarce collaboration of Washington and Beijing (12), most of the comments have been rather critical towards Brussels. Although the EU has for some time been conducting a more serious and coherent environmental policy as compared with the main international partners, it has seemed excessively shy and almost resigned to entrusting the planet's fate to the Sino-American duo. During the congress it passively (the only act of courage was indeed the cry of alarm launched by Sarkozy) (13) aligned itself on the not so brave position of the United States. According to the commentators the EU has given in on at least three key points. First of all, from the strictly financial point of view, it has accepted the fact that Washington should contribute a mere 3.5 billion dollars to the fund of immediate aid (the amount due to be allocated in the three-year period 2010-2012), while Brussels and Tokyo will pay in 10 billion dollars each.

In the second place, the EU has not been able to impose any binding constraint on the reduction of polluting emissions, although it has decided autonomously to

make a 20% cut by 2020. Lastly, it has shown it is not able to move in a complex and elaborate scenario (with as many as 192 nation present) such as that of the United Nations (14).

The latter element is no doubt worrying, at least in a future perspective. Indeed, it allows us to understand how the new institutions born from the Lisbon Treaty can provide useful impetus to the coherence of the European stance, but how they certainly cannot replace the political will of an EU that in Copenhagen has been considered by its own partners at most as a generous credit institute, certainly not as an important political body.

(1) *Un Delors "bis"?*, Le Monde, 04-11-2009

(2) P. Rousselin, *Improvisation européenne*, Le Figaro, 11-11-2009.

(3) V. Giscard d'Estaing, *Quand l'Ue improvise*, Le Point, 12-11-2009.

(4) *Couple discret*, Le Monde, 20-11-2009.

(5) P. Rousselin, *Sarkozy et Merkel, vrais patrons de l'Europe*, Le Figaro, 20-11-2009.

(6) J. Quatremer, *Commission européenne: la parité, un objectif lointain, très lointain...*, Libération, 25-11-2009.

(7) P. Briançon, *Le défi du président du Conseil européen: oublier ses parrains*, Le Monde, 24-11-2009.

(8) J-G. Fredet, *Plus petit podium commun*, Le Nouvel Observateur, 26-11-2009.

(9) N. Baverez, *Climat, yes we can*, Le Point, 13-12-2009.

(10) P. Rousselin, *Foire d'empoigne à Copenhague*, Le Figaro, 17-12-2009.

(11) G. Malaurie, *Les pluies acides de Copenhague*, Le Nouvel Observateur, 24-12-2009.

(12) J. Quatremer, *Copenhague, un échec européen?*, Libération, 20-12-2009.

(13) P.H. du Limbert, *Sarkozy : la leçon de Copenhague*, Le Figaro, 22-12-2009.

(14) H. Kempf, *L'Europe a démissionné à la conférence de Copenhague*, Le Monde, 24-12-2009.