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“The Impact of the Double Rejection of the European Constitution on Greece”

After the rejection of the European Constitution by France and the Netherlands, the European Council (16-17/6/2005) decided that it is wise to “freeze” the document. Therefore, at least until 2007, the EU enters into a transitional period, into a period of introspection. Following the discussion that takes place in Greece (unfortunately that discussion is mainly limited among academics) we come to the conclusion that this situation will more or less have a negative effect on Greece.

The most important consequence of the EU not producing (at least for the time being) a Constitutional Charter will probably be the delay of the enlargement process. It is argued that one of the main reasons that exhorted the French and the Dutch people to oppose to the European Constitution was the recent accelerating pace of the enlargement procedure, and particularly, the prospect of the Turkish accession. The prospect of the accession of other countries apart from Romania and Bulgaria seems remote, at least for the time being. Consequently, the accession process of Turkey as well as the European prospect of the Western Balkans is at stake. Therefore, the strategic objective of Greece is jeopardized. Greece expected that Turkey’s European perspective would motivate the normalization of the bilateral relations of the two countries. In addition, Greece will not be able to play a strategic role in the region given that the European embracement of the Western Balkans will not take place in the short-term. The vision of the South East Europe being an area of stability and prosperity is blurred. The entire reformative procedure in the countries of Western Balkans is jeopardized since the main driving force, the prospect of EU accession, is removed.

The two negative referenda also led to the weakening of the European Union’s international role. In addition, the fact that the prospect of future enlargement in the short term is contested weakens a very important instrument of the EU external policy: economic diplomacy. This situation affects the external role of Greece which, as a small country, depends directly on the stature of the European Union in the international scene.

The strategic vision of federalism seems to be severely wounded and the integrationist group of countries seems to be segmented. It is argued that the issue of subsidiarity will be more intensively discussed and that, in the short term, it will be more difficult to confer powers from the national to the European level. In brief, the negative vote of the French and the Dutch peoples disturbed the European integration process, which was weakened in the eyes of all European citizens. In addition, the adoption of liberal economic reforms will be negatively affected since, as it was shown from several surveys, one of the reasons for rejecting the European Constitution was the public fear that this document was extremely liberal. This situation could detain the process of modernization in Greece.

The crisis of the European Constitution seems to affect the institutional European architecture and to disjoint the European Union. The option of creating core groups in the context of the EU is widely discussed. This new European architecture would constitute a new challenge for all EU member states that will have to respond to new important dilemmas.

As far as Greece is concerned, the country should strive to participate in the core group. It would be better for Greece if participation in the eurogroup were the main criterion for the inclusion of a member state in the ‘core group’. In general, Greece should analyze the new situation prudently

and try to take the right decisions in order to minimize, if possible, the negative effects of those new developments.

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