

Holding the Council Presidency Finland is ready to salvage the EU Constitution, which was killed by the French and Dutch people in the referenda, by ratifying it in its Parliament late in the autumn. This shows the naive lack of self respect of the government just as it shows the will of others to use Finland as a disarming agent on the mine field of public opinion: the majority of people may be happy with the death of the Constitution even in those countries which have ratified the Constitution but did not have a referendum.

The rebirth of the Constitution by the ratification of the Finnish Parliament is not supported by the Finnish people. According to the opinion poll only 22 % of Finns think that it should be ratified by Finland. The majority of Finns wanted a referendum.

By ratification the government of Mr. Vanhanen takes a euro nationalist stance on the most important political question of its presidency. By doing so it opens a gap between Finland's political ambitions in the external field and the euro consciousness of its own people in the home country. According the Eurobarometer survey the Finns are one of the most eurosceptical nation in the European Union. Only 39 % consider the EU membership as a good thing and even this support is diminishing.

Finland is an active supporter of the militarisation of the EU by executing the military articles of the dead Constitution. The government opens its defence (and for the Crisis Management operations also its offence) procurement market for the European competition through the website of the European Defence Agency and encourages others to do the same. More seriously, from the point of view of its militarily non-aligned status, Finland has expressed its willingness to make the EU

battle troops operational by the end of its presidency. For that purpose the government has changed the Finnish crisis management law to be compatible with the Nato-aligned countries, and today the Finnish component of the EU strike force can attack to other countries without the mandate of the United Nations.

Presiding over the union the Finnish government is giving signals about its political commitment to further European integration in the federalist spirit. It leads to a wider gap between the opinions of the political elite and those of the people. In Finland, it is not traditional to come to the streets to express the unwillingness to commit oneself to the politics, and the dissatisfaction is manifested by marginalisation and non-voting in the elections.

Russia has not figured prominently on the EU agenda before the energy questions came to the foreground as a result of the energy price peaks. There is no self sufficiency of oil and gas in the EU countries, and in the near future the dependency on imported energy will rise to 70 %. The main source of imports is Russia, and for the EU there is no alternative. Russia, on the contrary, has many alternatives. The same oil and gas can be exported to the East or to the USA.

For more than 30 years Finland has imported gas, oil and electricity from its eastern neighbour and has not experienced the slightest problem. Due to the long-term contracts the price has even been below the market price.

This kind of positive experience can be turned to the advantage of the whole Union, and this is what Finland tries to do. The unofficial Summit in October in Lahti is being harnessed for this purpose. The overall EU dependency on fossil

fuels should also be discussed and the ambitious Swedish model explored.

Finland has liberalised its energy markets as decided in the EU. The presidency should remind certain member states about their commitments to do the same. One of the countries that shall be criticized is the next presidency country Germany. Finland is, however, weak to pose legal - or moral - questions about the delays or wrongdoings of the bigger nations.

On enlargement, Finland may witness the clash with Turkey. It may compensate the expected steps back in that field by leading Romania and Bulgaria successfully into the union. The promotion of Croatian membership will not be forgotten. There is a plan to have the institutional articles of the abandoned Constitution ratified in all the parliaments using Croatia as a vehicle; the entry of the 28th member state to the union needs the overall modification of the Treaty of Nice.

Presiding over the union in 1999, Finland opened the door the greater unity in the areas of justice, freedom and security. The federalist aim of the present presidency is to move certain inter-governmental lawmaking towards community laws so that national vetoes do not apply. These changes must be decided unanimously, and for that reason the immediate results are not foreseen.

However, this is one more sign of a small country's willingness not to defend its own interests but to swim downstream.