

The Centralization of Power in the European Union

LVMI-Youth Club Debate on April, 17 2008

The Youth Club of Ludwig von Mises Institute - Europe organized a debate on "The Centralization of Power in the European Union" held on April, 17 2008. Roger Helmer, Member of the European Parliament of the British Conservative Party and chairman of the Freedom Association, was invited as speaker and explained his critical opinion to the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union.

For the Youth Club it was a great pleasure to hold a debate with Roger Helmer, who is known for his critical view on the EU. In 1998 he started his political career and left his job as Managing Director in economy sector. For many years Helmer had been working and living in different South Asian countries as Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore, so that he sees himself as an international person who is aware of different cultures and the possibilities of international economic cooperation.

His term of office as Member of the European Parliament is characterized by a change of his opinion about the European Union: His first position, that creating of a European single market will solve many problems and bring benefits to every member state, changed in the opposite. An EU membership does not bring any benefit by comparing the costs of 5.5 % of GDP with the benefits of 1.8 % of GDP. In spite of this circumstance the European Union develops to a super state as areas of cooperation and EU law are increasing. Therefore Roger Helmer prefers to create a federal state, where each member state is independent and free and can cooperate with other countries depending on situation and demand.

The Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, however, leads directly to a centralization of EU's power and is forced on EU citizens in an undemocratic way according to Helmer. The European Union, which always emulates the US confederation model, created a constitution which is more bureaucratic and less democratic as the American. The MEP is especially concerned that the constitution itself and its introduction are less democratic: "If we would be democratic", he said, "we cannot go on" and mentioned some critical points.

Firstly the treaty does not call "we, the people" at the beginning of its text, but the names of member states. Secondly the constitution is unreadable, as the text is too complicated. It can be only understood by experts and not by EU citizens. In Helmer's opinion this circumstance demonstrates how less democratic the EU is comparing it with the US. There the constitution has short and readable sentences that can be understood by each citizen. Furthermore the European constitution is about the power of the state and not like the American one about the freedom of the people. Hence, it is dramatic that only the Irish vote about the treaty by a referendum. For other EU citizens their representatives in the European Parliament vote. It is necessary to consider that there is a big difference of opinion between MEPs and EU citizens. MEPs and other EU staff are usually persons who are in favor of the European Union and promoting centralization - Helmer as a critic of the EU is an exception together with a small number of MEPs. Helmer stated that it is irresponsible, that the Lisbon treaty corresponds almost totally with the former constitution which was declined by the French and the Dutch in 2004. Angela Merkel's declared about the EU treaty that only some cosmetic and terminal changes were made, but the legal impact is the same as in the first draft. According to Roger Helmer freedom and liberty as EU merits are not hold.

Attempts of forcing a referendum for all member states by Roger Helmer and some colleagues were not successful. In his opinion it was not correct that the president of the European Parliament avoided them. Proponents want to get through the EU treaty in any case, as there does not exist a plan B. If the Irish vote "NO", the EU will maybe give them an ultimatum: Either "Yes" to the treaty or out of the EU.

During the following discussion Roger Helmer stressed that Great Britain do not want to be governed by the EU. It prefers a voluntary cooperation, as the EU and its regulation makes the country poorer and less democratic. He dismissed objections of debate's participants that in times of globalization regional integration models like the European Union are needed by states and especially by smaller ones in order to be powerful in negotiations and to survive economically. The British MEP argued that this view is wrong. Small countries as Switzerland and Singapore show that they can perform well without being member of a regional integration program.

However, according to Annette Godart - van der Kroon, president of Ludwig von Mises Intitute - Europe, it is necessary to consider that EU member states profit from the European Union. By referring to the Bolkenstein Directive she mentioned, that the countries where this structure is applied have a few better economy than the others. One of these countries is the UK and its economy is flourishing - which cannot be said of France. The workers of new member states are willing to work in the service sector abroad, where wages are relative low, and boost the economy.

Nevertheless Helmer sees the countries as losers of regional integration. In Great Britain the citizens are unemployed, while foreigners find a work. Citizens of new member states are also underprivileged as their wages are relative low when they work abroad and in their home country the prices increase. In his opinion the EU as it exists currently is not a model for the future.