

“If we give Europeans European politics, they will give Europe their hearts and trust”

Speech to the Convention
by Senator Josef ZIELENIEC
Delegate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic
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A political lesson learned by new European democracies in the nineties

I have pondered, how I might, as the representative of the Czech Republic, a country only recently freed from the communism, bring my own **particular contribution to the success of this Convention**.

In the early nineties, we, the citizens of these newly democratic countries have learned unique political lesson thanks to a complicated quest for an appropriate political framework for our new democratic life. Many spoke at that time about a so-called “Third Way” – a solution both friendly and understandable to citizens, and one susceptible not to be controlled by political parties and elite.

Today, I must tell you, that not only was it a blessing we were not successful in this endeavour, but also that this failure was naturally unavoidable. **The governance of a country must be built on a system of competition among different political projects.** And in determining the winner of this competition, the citizen is sole arbiter. **An undeniable linkage between the citizens’ will and what actually happens in the country is the only means by which the citizens may identify themselves with their political system.** Citizens are rarely fond of such politics because such a system reflects themselves and their own faults; but at least they respect it, knowing that this is the only acceptable way to govern the country.

Europe must avoid the impasse of apolitical politics

Thus, I arrive at our current debate about the future of the European Union. I am frequently reminded by our discussions here of those **debates on apolitical politics**. We agree that our task is to **make the Union understandable and accepted by its citizens**. Of course, it is important, but **it is about symptoms of the greater problem, not about its essence**. And this is: **while there are fifteen national politics, there is no, or nearly no, European politics**. In other words, all political projects of the Union are taking place *de facto* outside of any normal political competition.

Just last week an EU summit was concluded in Barcelona, focused specifically on the future of the European single market. Some decisions were taken, which in any normal political system would have been exposed to the test of competition among rival proposals, each of which would compete for

the favour of the electorate. It is not so in the Union. **At the European level, very political questions are decided through apolitical decision-making.** It might seem to some, that decision-making at the European level, free from politics, political passions or risks of political demagoguery, is a system best suited to its task, able to always find out a technocratic compromise. Yet, this is only appearance. **Beneath the façade of compromise, we advance farther and farther at an impasse and the lack of politics cannot be filled by even the best functioning of the Union's well-intentioned projects to promote transparency and distribute more information.**

Necessary starting-point: provide space for political life at European level

In front of us lies the debate on the **institutional solution** for the political framework of Europe. I am convinced that **various solutions are possible, but only on the principle that we agree about the fundamental starting-point: that we must provide ample space for European political life and a platform for political competition.** We have to attack the culture of technical compromise and expert legitimacy which currently prevails within the Union and which **is the cause of alienation and disaffection between the Union and its citizens.**

Make no mistake; **this alienation is a dangerous threat for the nascent pan-European identity.** A favourite witticism of administrative officials, that some decisions are too important to let politicians make, is the very heart of the problem that the process of European integration now faces. **If we open the European Union for politics** (and I stress once more that there are several ways how to do so) **we will no longer need to worry how best we can superficially dress-up Europe with a civic face.** Under a competitive political system, it will happen automatically.

No politics without reversibility of the decision-making

I can advise one of my fellow citizens, who is complaining about a political decision, to invest his own talent, energy and time, to enter directly politics. If he is able to convince a majority of his fellow citizens, he will be empowered to change the very thing that originally inspired his complaint. **We cannot advise a European citizen this banal but fascinating principle of democratic politics, which is working at local, regional or national level, but not at the European one.** European decision-making based on intergovernmental bargaining makes its own decisions nearly irreversible. And as long as it will be so, we can pile up „White papers on Governance“ and organise more and more discussion forums.

Let us give European citizens classically working European politics. If we succeed in doing so, citizens will give Europe their hearts and trust.