

HELMUT MARKOV: WE HAVE TO TRY TO BUILD EUROPE OF REGIONS

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The German MEP Helmut Markov, chairman of the EP Committee on International Trade, is a member of the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left, Germany. Which change in the European institutions functioning according to the Treaty of Lisbon is of greatest importance to European citizens?

In my personal view after the entering into force of the Treaty of Lisbon one of the most important changes which occurred in the EU is that the citizens are granted the right of legislative initiative, by gathering one million signatures in support. This is more than a referendum. This is essentially direct democracy in action.

The EP also acquires more means for full-scale and profound impact on the legislative process by increasing the number of spheres needing co-decision procedure. This is a great advantage.

Despite the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon provides us with a lot of advantages it also considers issues that in my opinion should not be regulated in such way. These are, for example, the European army and armaments as well as the armed intervention issues. We do need some kind of European armaments in order to consider actions in the event of possible need for armed intervention. I think that the issue calls for debates.

Which are, in your opinion, the most sensitive issues which will motivate the European citizens to take advantage of their right of legislative initiative?

It is a difficult question to answer. The right of interference in European policy-making of the citizens acting as legislators is more likely to be of our interest but it can also be against it. To create social Europe - this is probably one of the most important goals of European citizens. However, globalization for instance, can unite our efforts for economic prosperity but it can also have a negative effect - a lot of productions are exported abroad, employment and social standard rates change dramatically.

Very often the EU can not reach a compromise on crucial political and economic issues. How the differences in opinion among member-states influence the EP in the process of adopting decisions according to the broad compromise principle?

Reaching compromise is a great responsibility. With 27 member-states, and probably more in the future, this turns out to be a difficult process. We must try to build Europe not as a community of nations but of regions. Then we will have the chance. If we see it as alliance of different states this endeavour will be more difficult. The implementation of this policy takes time but I am an optimist.

In June 2009 new elections for the EP are coming. What will, in your opinion, motivate voters to participate?

This is a really topical issue in all member-states. At present, an average of 80% of European policy is formed on national level in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Thus, when a decision is good for a specific state, local authorities say: "Yes, this is our decision". But when it is not so good they say "We do it because of Brussels". For instance, it is not our job to decide how the public transport in Sofia would be operated; this is a prerogative of the municipality and citizens.

Low turnout at EP elections is a common trend overall. In my view we need a longer-term European

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policy vision because even everyday issues like electricity or milk production standards are coming from the EU in terms of production destination, quota and requirements. It is our obligation to explain to citizens that this is also related to the EU; that through their everyday work they contribute to the common living in the European family. But this is a question of time - to start feeling as Europeans, not simply as Bulgarians, Germans or English people. We are Europeans after all.