

VANISHING CYPRUS

WHITE VOTE - POLITICAL TSUNAMI

Andreas C. Chrysafis

Author – Writer - Painter

This year's EU Parliamentary elections have certainly triggered a political tsunami; a tsunami that has swept right across the Eurozone to shake up the basic foundations of the entire political establishment. Over sixty percent of the electorate has turned its back on the EU institution while Euro-skepticism has reached boiling point. The abstention vote has sent a serious message that something is badly wrong with Euroland; one that keeps on promising prosperity but never delivers.

On the contrary, citizens have been enduring harsh EU policies and over-regulation for years and it's not surprising people retaliated in such a manner at the polls. The noble idea of a Common Market offering the freedom of travel and trade across a borderless Europe was a welcome initiative but that was never the objective of its founders.

Instead the EU has emerged as a supranational ruling system that favours banks, hedge funds, corporations and super rich, at the expense of the masses. It's not accountable to anyone and does not have to answer for its practices – they are the untouchables! Actually the EU has become a powerful windstorm generated by a supranational institutional order designed by the rich for the rich.

Behind the veneer of this mythical "one happy family" lurks a more sinister force; a force that is not often mentioned! In fact it dictates EU policies in the shadows of darkness. This is the elusive horde of unaccountable and manipulative corporate lobbyists who share a strong influence in decisions affecting the entire Eurozone countries and beyond.

Strategically located in Brussels, more than 30.000 corporate lobbyists working in more than 2.800 firms roam the corridors of power perpetually shifting the rules in the favour of multinational corporations. Big money worth millions - if not billions - is spent to influence decisions or to block directives that may threaten corporate profit margins and dampen expansion.

The resulting loss of democracy in the decision-making process reaffirms that EU citizens were never meant to be the masters of their own destiny but multinationals and bankers were. This is not what the European citizens signed up to when they joined the European Common Market.

Comparably, on May 1, 2004 a pro-European government hoodwinked the people of Cyprus on joining the EU institution on the premise that a Cyprus solution through the EU was inevitable; that was the clincher!

Without a referendum misguided political parties voted in favour of joining the EU and the government signed on the dotted line, which changed the island forever.

At the time citizens enjoyed one of the highest standards of living with a per capita income of 100% of the EU 27 average. It boasted zero unemployment (unheard of) and the country was one of the most prosperous nations in the Mediterranean region – for Cyprus the sky was the limit! The nation was experiencing an amazing progress and found it necessary to import labour migrants to cope with the growth. If it was not for the political situation there was no logical reason to abandon this wealth and join the EU on a presumption to reunite the island.

Ten years later and a full member of the EU, Cyprus regressed into its present appalling state of affairs. Today the country is close to bankruptcy with over 120.000 people unemployed and thousands of businesses gone under while 40.000 persons rely on charities for their daily food provisions. Soup kitchens have now become a part of the poverty lifeline and EU/Troika continues to peck off all hopes through crippling loans, whereas bank depositors saw their accounts robbed by their own government. Those are conditions that revolutions are made of but instead; Cypriots chose the ballot box and turned their back on the EU that has let them down so badly – abstaining from voting at the Parliamentary elections was their way of expressing their bitter anger on those who betrayed their trust.

With hindsight there are a number of reasons for the nation's woes but primarily unwise politicians took it upon themselves and decided: (a) for Cyprus to become a full member of the EU (b) to abandon the right to govern the country and (c) abandoned its strong currency in adopting the Euro currency. Theoretically, constitutional changes demand the approval of the nation but in this case, the public was not only kept in the dark but they were also deprived of a referendum to decide what's best for them.

Abstention retaliation against the polls across Europe was a crashing defeat for the establishment and Cypriots retaliated in a similar way with massive 57% abstentions in line with the rest of Europe. They all sent a crystal clear message to all the political parties and EU: a message that shook up their cozy coexistence. Abstention voters were the heroes of the day and a new power to be reckoned with in the future.

Those results are strong indications that important changes are necessary in the electoral system to recognize the "white" protest vote as an integral part of the elections process. Similar to a referendum, a "white" vote acts as a "people's veto" against ill-conceived government policies or any constitutional change that demand the overwhelming support of the people.

The result of EU elections demonstrated that the largest unofficial political party in Cyprus today, is made up of the 340.000 abstention voters who have become a powerful group of disenfranchised citizens. This is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored.

In fact, voters do not abstain without a reason or because they are lazy or they don't care as some would claim; they abstain because they have lost faith in a system that has betrayed them so bitterly. The present mood is an angry one and demonstrates that politicians can no longer be trusted with important constitutional decisions and a "white" protest vote is the way forward. It offers people the freedom of another choice and the mechanism to stop the growth of elected dictatorship.

Abstentions votes can be interpreted in two ways; one, as a strong protest against unpopular policies and a government that no longer represent people's expectations; and secondly, a feeling of helplessness of not being able to do anything about the situation no matter how they vote or who gets elected into office.

Rather than not vote at all, the introduction of a "white" protest vote provides the final segment of people's democratic rights. At present, abstention votes have no influence at all but casting a "white" vote cannot be ignored or discarded into the bin. Unfortunately today, their numbers have no influence on the election outcome and that's precisely what needs to be radically changed and for many reasons indeed:

1. Casting a white protest vote, citizens exercise their civic duty as active voters;
2. A white vote reflects the mood of the electorate especially by those objecting in the way the government and politicians handle the affairs of the nation;
3. It enhances the rights of the people and strengthens the principle of a true democracy by eliminating the marginalization of a vast sector of citizens from the electoral process;
4. An overall majority of white protest votes offers a democratic right to a call of "no confidence" in government or the political system;
5. It defines true electorate figures of political-party influence and support;
6. The sanctioning of a white protest vote encourages ballot participation and reduces abstentions;
7. It provides an alternative for active citizenship in the affairs of the nation without the demand to be a member of a specific political party;
8. It enhances the democratic principle in citizens' direct involvement and reduces the possibilities of minority-governance through political party deals;
9. Recognition of protest votes enables political parties to move forward;

10. A white protest vote acts - and can be used - as a powerful "people's veto".

Fifty-seven percent or 340.000 abstentions cannot all be wrong. If and when a "white" protest vote is introduced then one can be assured that an exit from the EU will be the next likely move by the citizens of Cyprus.

Cyprus will then be able to decide its own destiny and not remain a victim of EU lobbyists, banking corporations, Troika, hedge funds and multinationals. Then, one would smell the sweet scent of a true democracy in action...