
Interview: Harry van Bommel

Treaty Would Deprive Nations of Veto Right

Mr. van Bommel is a member of the Parliament of the Netherlands, and the foreign policy specialist of the Socialist Party, which is the country's third party and is currently leading the opposition in Parliament. Dean Andromidas interviewed him on March 26, 2008.



Goverit de Roos

EIR: I understand you were the leader of the “no” vote during the referendum of 2005 in the Netherlands, which led to the defeat of the European Constitution. Could you tell us about your party’s role in that campaign?

van Bommel: In the Netherlands we have two political groups; they are really streams, because there are more political parties on the left and the right that are against Europe federalizing at a quick speed. And of all the parties campaigning against the treaty, we were the biggest party, the best organized party. We have a long tradition of campaigning at all levels—local, national, and international. And we were able to organize all our branches throughout the country to play a role in a national campaign, first to inform the people what the

treaty was about, and second to get people out to vote, and to vote “no.” As a socialist party, people did not immediately expect us to be against this treaty, but we were able to prove that this Europe [which would result from the treaty] is the Europe that is wanted by the multinationals, who think that the market is the only way to achieve things; and we showed that this constitutional treaty was a neo-liberal product in itself, leading to an undemocratic superstate, leading to a militarizing Europe, and a Europe where especially the smaller states have far less of a role to play. Those arguments, all together, made many people interested in what the treaty was about, and gave them the opportunity to get more information. More information in many instances leads to a “no,” when it comes to European treaties.

We were the only party on the left [opposing the treaty]. On the right side was Wilders,¹ who is now in the news with his film. He was very much against the treaty, because it would give Turkey, after accession to the EU, more influence in Europe. That was one of his main reasons. Also smaller Christian parties were against the treaty, because they do not want Europe to become a federal state. And they acknowledged, just as we did, that this treaty was taking a big step towards a federal Europe.

EIR: Your party is now leading a campaign to hold a national referendum on the treaty.

van Bommel: Our activists have been trying to collect signatures. But I have to be honest, that it’s not right now at the top of the agenda of the general public in the Netherlands. Maybe that is because our government has been very successful in depoliticizing the debate on the treaty, by saying, “No, it is not a constitution anymore,” and, “We got what we wanted” and “There is not much left of the old treaty,” which is all a pack of lies. But it does give the coalition parties the possibility to kill all attempts to have a debate. Nonetheless, we will have more debate when ratification comes closer, and in order to have the political possibility of a referendum, we, together with a couple of other political parties, prepared a bill for Parliament, which will be taken up, I think, within two months or so. So we tried it at both ends; the political end and the public end, by writing articles, by having public debates, by collecting signatures.

Impact of the Financial Crisis

EIR: We are experiencing the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. We are clearly in a systemic crisis, where the collapse of the current international financial system can only be resolved through national governments establishing a new system, along the lines of the New Bretton Woods system. As the economic crisis deepens, do you think

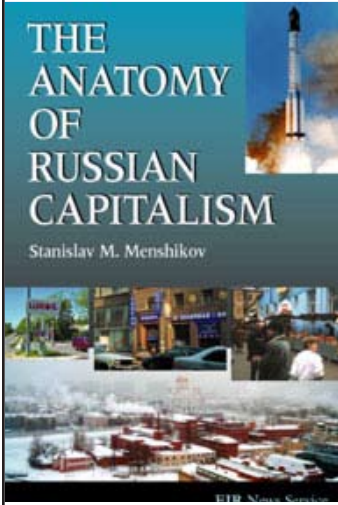
1. The Islamophobe Geert Wilders is the leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, which has campaigned against immigration. He produced a 15-minute film, “Fitna,” which is an attack on Islam.

this will sway the public?

van Bommel: It will influence the public, because at times of financial and economic problems, the government is not trusted, because it is not able to really change the difficult position of market forces; what it can do is try to “pep talk” the people, in order to foster trust in the economy and the financial system. But in the end, that will not do the trick, and when the people find out, when governments and Europe are not able to prevent the financial markets from losing ground, that will result in general distrust. And that will have an effect on any European treaty to be decided upon, because people will even fear what it all might lead to.

EIR: In a time of economic crisis it is only the government that can intervene, as FDR intervened in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. Don’t you think this is an important point to make in the campaign?

van Bommel: Yes indeed, also because this is one of the major crises we are facing today, and we don’t know where it is going to stop. Your prediction, that it will in the end lead to a new system, might be true, but I cannot prove that prediction, and neither can you. But that we have a serious problem at hand is obvious to anyone, and that there are large players involved as well.



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Militarization of the European Union

EIR: The Lisbon Treaty opens the way for militarizing the European Union. How do you see this?

van Bommel: Yes, that’s the same as it was in the former, constitutional treaty, and it clearly shows the ambition to have a genuine European state, with a common foreign policy and army to carry out the military tasks that accompany that general foreign policy. And although we have many differences in Europe, we already see EU battle groups; we see EU military missions in the Balkans, in Afghanistan. It’s not so much a risk, as it is already a *fact*, that we are following this trend of making Europe a military power parallel to NATO, looking for its own theater throughout the world, because it is not about Europe, it is about the world.

There are also the Articles about mutual assistance whenever there is a crisis. And with Europe growing larger, and accepting states that have had violence in the last ten years, and even with the Cyprus problem and other issues—when you add all this up, you see that there is a large risk, which we are enhancing by accepting this treaty. And there is almost no debate on this issue, which I regret very much, because the implication of creating EU battle groups and forcing countries to improve their military capabilities, and accepting that the EU should become a military power, should really not be done without a serious debate.

EIR: A group of five generals, former chiefs of staff in their respective armed forces, published a report on transforming NATO and EU defense policy. No sooner was this report released, than a few weeks later, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana released an EU energy security report which is almost identical to recommendations made by the five generals’ report.

van Bommel: That’s true, it all fits together. Solana has a NATO background; these generals have a NATO background. So what we see is that the EU and NATO are now, in a way, growing towards each other, where the EU is offering NATO the possibility of EU forces taking over where NATO leaves the theater. That partly has to do with the crisis in NATO, where many countries are not willing to deliver what they promised or should deliver. And therefore the EU in the future might be an alternative source of forces that are not available from NATO countries.

EIR: The question becomes, who is the enemy?

van Bommel: Reading the papers of the chiefs of staff and Solana, the enemy is terrorism. The enemy might be countries that are not willing to fully cooperate with critical infrastructure projects, such as pipelines, waterways, and other important infrastructure. So a new task for NATO is seen, and in the future also for the EU forces.

EIR: Do you see this as pure adventurism?

van Bommel: Yes, it is.

EIR: This is making a more dangerous world. We need cooperation among the major powers, including the U.S., Russia, China, India, and Europe.

van Bommel: It is leading to a new Cold War. That is what I said this morning, in a debate with our Secretary of Foreign Affairs. But they disagree. They say a missile defense plan in Europe is not a threat to Russia. There is no willingness to look at it from Russia's standpoint, and that leads to impossible debates, when it comes to enlarging NATO with Ukraine and Georgia. They are creating facts on the ground, so that there are no alternatives, and that we have to accept the American missile defense, and even take part in it. And force Russia to also accept that.

Prospects for the Treaty's Passage

EIR: How do you consider the prospects for de-ratification, if the treaty passes?

van Bommel: I think it is very hard to de-ratify a treaty. We haven't seen that happening with former treaties. I would much rather put it to a referendum, than rely on the possibility of de-ratifying treaties.

EIR: Can you say something more about what you see as a danger of this treaty for the Netherlands?

van Bommel: The fact that we are giving up sovereignty by handing over veto rights, accepting the qualified majority vote, is seen as something that we should have never accepted. And therefore, we feel we are betrayed by our own government, because the steps towards a federal Europe, where the position of smaller countries such as the Netherlands would be endangered, is something that they should have taken into account and they haven't. They simply accepted a treaty that is 95% the same as the old constitutional treaty, and thereby they fooled everyone who said "no," by saying it is not a constitution anymore—the flag and the hymn are out of it, there are no symbols that have to do with a federal state. So it is not just what is in the treaty; it is also what they have taken out that makes us feel betrayed.

One of our arguments is that we have enlarged Europe so quickly, that the difference between the new states and the old states, have grown so much that it would be far wiser to let the 27 [member nations of the EU] now come and grow towards a European average on many aspects—social, economical, political in the fight against corruption, etc.—and then see if we want to change the rules on how we govern Europe. As long as that is not the case, we will face many differences of opinion, and by giving up veto rights, you force countries to accept policies that many people would not otherwise have accepted. Meaning that in the future, heads of state will go home saying, "We were against it, but the majority was in favor," and thereby endangering the public support for Europe even more. So in the short term, it might seem to

be good not to have a referendum, and change the rules on how the decision-making process takes place; but in the long run, this does not help the people who want to build a strong Europe. Because no entity can survive without public support, and Europe lacks public support more than it lacks the ability to govern.