

*François Saint-Ouen*

*Academic Foresights*

## European Federalism

### *How do you analyze the present status of European federalism?*

After a long eclipse - even a purgatory - is it time to raise again the question of “federalism” in Europe? And, if so, in which way? The idea of an “European Federation” is not new, as it was mentioned several times in the famous Schuman Declaration of May 1950, launching the process of what became later the “European Union”. However, in the 1960s the concept became the victim of General De Gaulle’s opposition, and during the 1970s and 1980s of Margaret Thatcher’s euroscepticism, who used to consider “federalism” as a “f” word. A few years later, during the negotiations of the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, his successor John Major successfully opposed the idea of having an “European Federation” as an objective for the European Union.

Now, in the current context of globalization, and considering an European Union becoming more and more diverse with 28 members, would the federalist thinking be of any help to strengthen the Union and avoid its slow dislocation after the “Brexit”? Actually, the European Union has always been a compound of three basic, partly contradictory orientations.

The most classical stance is the intergovernmental approach which one can find also in “classical” international organizations. In the EU, this logic is symbolized by the *European Council* (created in 1974) gathering the heads of states and governments, and the *Council* (existing since the beginning in the early 1950s) composed of national ministers.

The second approach, which we can call “integration”, has been a characteristic of the uniting process of Europe since Jean Monnet, who “invented” it in a soft attempt to bypass national sovereignties: in this line of thought, integration is not directly political, but concrete and sectoral, focused mainly on the economy. This integration process is led by the *European Commission*. It has a rather technical, and even technocratic, character.

Last but not least, there is the federalist approach, which is now symbolized by the *European Parliament*, since 1979 directly elected by the citizens of the member countries. We can also find a trace of it in the *double majority* which is required for a decision to be adopted in the Council of Ministers (55% of the *States* representing 65% of the *population*).

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of the population).

### *In your opinion, how will the situation likely evolve over the next five years?*

It is important to make a clear distinction between integration and federalism, because they are often mixed up and put into the same basket. To cut it short, federalism is political and global, while integration is sectoral and technical. Federalism is based on political legitimacy, transparency and accountability, while integration is based on harmonization (sometimes standardization) and technical expertise. Thus, the difference between federalism and integration is not the depth of centralization, as it is generally assumed (federalism designating, for many people, the highest possible integration), but of nature. In fact, a federal system can be less centralized than an integrated one. We can predict that the support for more integration will decline over the next five years. The point is then: which other approach will benefit from this shift? The classical “interstate”, or the federalist approach?

In this perspective, it is important to recall that federalist thinking is not unified, but divided into two main tendencies. The best known is probably – at least as far as Europe’s future is concerned – the least interesting: it is focused on the state, and aspires to build a federal state. In the EU process, it refers to the Altiero Spinelli (1907-1986) heritage, and is today advocated by the so-called “Spinelli group”: his main source of inspiration remains the US experience in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Convention of delegates elaborating a federal Constitution, as in Philadelphia in 1787).

The second orientation of federalist thinking has its roots in the Christian philosophy of “personalism” which developed in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and has been very influential in the The Hague Congress in May 1948, a milestone in the early years of the uniting of Europe. This approach is much more focused on society, culture and the citizen, rather than on the state. It may gain momentum over the next five years

To take only this example, the specificities of Switzerland are a combination of the two models: model 1 for the federal institutions, mainly the Parliament, copied from the USA; model 2 for the so-called “direct democracy” (initiatives and referenda).

### *What are the structural long-term perspectives?*

If we take under consideration what has been sketched out above, it is thinkable to see in the federalist thinking a possible matrix for a democratic “European Commonwealth of Nations” based on a conception of federalism defined as “organized freedom” (as it was underlined in the The Hague Congress in 1948) and freed of the weight of pure interstate or intergovernmental conceptions which are traditionally associated with the idea of an Europe of nations (or states, or nation-states).

In contrast with a “Confederation”, which is frequently used in a purely intergovernmental perspective, the concept of “Commonwealth” puts more stress on union, and less stress on standardization than the current EU integration. Moreover

union, and less stress on standardization than the current EU integration. Moreover, such a “non-unitary unity” corresponds to the European culture, both one and diverse, and is not reducible to an addition of nation-states.

This conception could easily accommodate a multi-speed Europe, with a federal core of a few countries, remaining open to others, according to the procedure of “enhanced cooperation” which can be launched, under the Lisbon Treaty, at the initiative of at least 9 member states. It could also help to secure an organic relation with the candidate and neighbourhood countries of the EU, something which is not currently achieved under the enlargement and neighbourhood policies, as both are in deep crisis.

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**François Saint-Ouen** *is senior lecturer at the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva and Secretary General of the European Centre of Culture. He has specialized in multilevel governance, bottom-up federalism, local democracy, sustainable development at local and regional levels, cultural dynamics in Europe and “Dialogue between Cultures”.*

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