

‘The “federal goal” of European union’ from L’Europe en formation

Caption: In its summer 1991 edition, the federalist journal L’Europe en formation analyses the draft Treaty on European Union drawn up by the Luxembourg Presidency, and revives the debate on the union’s ‘federal vocation’.

Source: L’Europe en formation. Eté 1991, n° 281. Nice. "Union européenne et 'vocation fédérale'", p. 3-6.

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The ‘federal goal’ of European union

Editorial

The Luxembourg Presidency has taken on responsibility for the first six months of negotiations on Economic and Monetary Union and Political Union. On 18 June, Jacques Santer and Jacques Poos finalised a ‘Draft of a Consolidated Treaty’ to be submitted to the European Council of 28 and 29 June. It will serve as the basis for discussions intended to lead to a final decision at the European Council in Maastricht on 9 and 12 December, at the end of the Dutch Presidency.

A short sentence at the end of the first article in the preamble to the basic document submitted to the Community’s twelve governments has not gone unnoticed: ‘This treaty marks a new stage in a process leading gradually to a union with a federal goal.’ The representatives of eight States participating in the negotiations have accepted that explicit goal. They include all the Community’s founding States that subscribed, in 1950, to Robert Schuman’s equally explicit aim of a European federation. But now, in 1991, Britain, followed by Denmark and, with some fine distinctions, Portugal, has rejected this iconoclastic objective. France, while not rejecting the federal approach as such, has felt compelled to warn against ‘theological squabbles’ and to advise caution on the part of its partners, reminding them that the intergovernmental conferences on monetary union and political union require the unanimous agreement of the Member States. The alternative is failure.

In an interesting circular dated 3 July, sent to members of the AFEUR (Association française pour l’étude de l’union européenne), Robert Toulemon, a known federalist, comments that ‘the Luxembourg Presidency tried to correct the unfavourable impression made by its April text by drafting a preamble to the treaty that invoked the union’s ‘federal goal’, but it succeeded only in unnecessarily provoking the British allergic reaction to any declaration of principle not directly connected to present needs.’ He concludes that ‘it is therefore better to avoid any mention of federalism but to take a few practical steps towards it,’ and points out that ‘the draft treaty is presented as marking a new stage in a process leading gradually to a union with a federal goal.’ Note the use of a double future. What the text should say is that the union already has a federal goal, or that the process of unification will culminate in the establishment of a federation.

In his editorial of 11 July in *Agence Europe* — by far the best-informed source on Community issues — Emanuele Gazzo welcomes the fact that discussion of this issue, previously confined to the initiated, has erupted into the public sphere, but comments that ‘we warned against excessive euphoria because the mention of a federal goal does not constitute a firm commitment, and it would be abandoning the substance for the shadow to drop real commitments to the structural unity of the treaty, genuine democratisation of the Community, and restoration of the balance and separation of Community powers, in exchange for a promise that would not be kept.’ He nevertheless finds it hard to understand the attitude of what Chiti Batelli has dubbed ‘seasoned continental federalists’, who do not seem to have grasped how much new ground has been broken.

Be that as it may, discussion concerning the federal goal of the European Community has become a real debate, especially on the other side of the Channel, where, in the holy of holies at 10 Downing Street, they are not far from thinking that the Luxembourg Presidency, inspired by the perfidious Jacques Delors, is engaged in some sort of provocation. Yet, as far as we know, the President of the Commission has always taken a very moderate stance on the issue. Addressing the European Parliament on 12 June, he expressed his own conviction in the following terms: ‘Even if European integration is a gradual process, a window must be left open for the possibility of one day having a federal Europe. Federalism is not the caricature that had been made of it ... for me it is the highest form of democracy.’ Speaking to the press in Brussels on 27 June, he added: ‘I am pleased by the great public debate taking place in the United Kingdom ... Yet what was the reason for inserting ‘federal goal’ in the draft of the new treaty? It was that eight Member States considered that the previous preliminary draft proposed an institutional structure that was too complex and did not leave a window open for union.’ Delors defines federalism as ‘a system coordinating the autonomous activities of several collectivities’.

Finally, in a resolution critical of the Luxembourg Summit, the European Parliament confirmed 'its attachment to a federal goal for Europe' and stressed that 'federalism does not imply the creation of a unitary super-State (...), each State retaining its identity and having powers conferred upon it in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.'

Even if, as there is reason to believe, the draft that will in principle be adopted at Maastricht will no longer mention a 'federal goal', the issue of federalism will not really be settled until a later stage in the process of European union. We can at least be certain that the 'thing' (as Mrs Thatcher calls it) will not go away. Nor will it be confined to a war of words between Chancellor Kohl, the natural guardian of Germany's federal experience, and John Major, who says he does not know what people mean by 'federalism' since the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* and *Longer Oxford Dictionary* offer various definitions.

Strangely, the issue was raised not by avant-garde movements, which are scarce enough nowadays, but by the highest national and European authorities that bear crucial responsibility for European integration, at a time when the Yugoslav federation is exploding and the laborious process of transforming Lenin's Union of Soviet Socialist Republics into Gorbachev and Yeltsin's Union of Sovereign Soviet Republics is under way. The great crisis of European communism is a timely reminder that totalitarianism and federalism are absolutely incompatible, as Denis de Rougemont, Alexandre Marc and others have been teaching for years with reference to the European upheavals of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.