

'Fischer comes out for a United States of Europe' from Le Figaro (13 May 2000)

Caption: On 13 May 2000, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro comments on the address given by Joschka Fischer, German Foreign Minister, in which he proposes, in a personal capacity, the conclusion of a Constitutional Treaty establishing a European Federation based on the principle of subsidiarity.

Source: Le Figaro. 13.05.2000, n° 17 341. Paris. "Fischer pour les États-Unis d'Europe", auteur:Picaper, Jean-Paul , p. 1;5.

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Bombshell as German Foreign Minister advocates a European federation

Fischer supports a United States of Europe

Berlin: Jean-Paul Picaper

At a time when the Europhiles are all deploring rampant ‘eurosclerosis’ while the Eurosceptics, encouraged by the poor performance of the euro, are emerging from their burrows and everyone is lamenting the absence of one of those Franco-German initiatives to buck up the economy which the Kohl-Mitterrand duo used to supply, the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, has dropped a bombshell. Europe, he said in a keynote speech in Berlin yesterday, has to become a ‘federation’. The way ahead leads to a United States of Europe, one which turns its back on the Europe of nation-states.

‘I know that for many British people the idea of a federation is like a red rag to a bull, but I cannot come up with any other,’ said the Minister, adding that ‘this federation will have to be based on a constitutional treaty’. He admits, however, that it would be a mistake ‘to try to bring about political integration in opposition to existing national traditions and institutions, without seeking to incorporate them’. Mr Fischer therefore proposes the establishment of a bicameral European Parliament, with one chamber representing the nation-states and the other the People’s Europe.

The first would be similar to the German Bundesrat, which represents the Länder, but only their governments, whereas Fischer wants to see members of national parliaments sitting in it. The second chamber would consist of representatives directly elected by the citizens, as in the German Bundestag.

As regards the European executive body, Mr Fischer sees two possible solutions. ‘Either we decide to continue transforming the European Council into a European Government, in other words we decide that the European Government will be formed from the national governments, or we move away from the Commission’s present structure towards the direct election of a President with wide-ranging executive powers.’ If such a restructuring is not carried out, the present ‘confederation’ of States, which is merely an ‘artificial construct’, would, in the Minister’s view, run the risk of being paralysed after its enlargement to encompass 27 or 30 countries. So a living, active Europe must be given a Parliament which passes laws and a Government which takes decisions.

This ‘Fischerite’ vision of a future Europe stands in sharp contrast to the situation in Europe today. The Minister, a member of the Green Party, has taken care to distinguish between what is ‘national’ and what is ‘European’ in his constitutional plan, and he talks about a ‘European federation which is lean and therefore capable of action’.

‘The sharing of sovereignty between the federation and the nation-states,’ he said, ‘requires a constitutional treaty which lays down what has to be regulated at European level and what at nation-state level. This constitutional treaty would transfer to the federation the core of national sovereignty and only what has to be regulated at European level, with everything else remaining a matter for the nation-states.’

The Minister presented his reform as a two- or three-stage process, beginning ‘with enhanced cooperation between those States which want to cooperate more closely than others, as is already the case with Economic and Monetary Union and the Schengen Agreement.’

This could lead eventually to a ‘transformation of the 11-member eurozone into a political and economic union covering environmental protection, action to combat crime, the development of an asylum and immigration policy and also, of course, a foreign and security policy.’

‘However,’ he said, ‘this cooperation must not be interpreted as an alternative to integration.’ Then he went on to his main idea: ‘An intermediate step towards the establishment of political union could be the establishment of a “centre of gravitation”.’ This grouping would consist of a club of States which ‘would sign a new European basic treaty constituting the nucleus of the constitution for the federation’. This treaty

would provide this 'centre' with its own institutions, i.e. 'a Government which would speak for the Union with a single voice on as many questions as possible, a strong Parliament and a directly elected President'.

The 'centre of gravitation would have to be the vanguard, the motive force for the completion of political integration, and it would have to include the essence of the future federation,' Joschka Fischer concluded, adding that membership thereof would not be exclusive but would be open to any country which accepted its constraints.

Fischer admits that he is speaking only for himself. But people suspect that what he has done is to show Gerhard Schröder his trial balloon before releasing it.