

# European Letter

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Special issue

## A LOOK BEYOND THE CONSTITUTIONAL TREATY: A “DUAL STRATEGY” TO RELAUNCH THE FEDERALIST BATTLE

**1 - Either the political unification of Europe restarts from a “core” of countries, launched by France, Germany and some of the other founders, or the Union risks eventually to unravel.**

After the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954, twice were the member states of the European Community confronted with the political consequences of economic integration and of the enlargement to new member states: at the end of the Sixties, once the transitional period of the European Common Market was completed, and at the beginning of the Nineties, once the Maastricht Treaty was ratified and the creation of the single currency got underway. In the Sixties and in the Seventies, the enlargement of the European Community to Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark (who were in favour of a common market but opposed to any prospect of a European federation) was balanced by the political impetus provided by direct election of the European Parliament (i.e. the idea of affirming European democracy) and by the goal of the European currency (i.e. the idea of providing Europe with the power of “the purse”). This kept the idea of the political unification of Europe alive. Throughout the Nineties the absence of a political project to accompany the creation of the European currency coupled with the doubling of the member states of the European Union have progressively vanished any remaining possibility of transforming the European Union into a true federation - the ultimate goal that was indicated by the Schumann declaration. Since then the Europeans have been living in a sort of *institutional limbo*. The Union has progressively attained more competences and has extended to more members, but a European power hasn't emerged and the final deciders on all crucial European questions – both in the field of economic development and in the foreign, security and defence policy – remain the national governments. The consequence is a weak and divided Europe which is ever more marginalized on the world scene. The attempts to reform the European institutions through three intergovernmental conferences that have taken place during the last 10 years have been futile as they have not brought about any structural change. Meanwhile the Union has extended to comprise twenty-seven ever more heterogeneous member states (expected to become thirty in the not too distant future) with very diverse attitudes to the Union, its structure, its role in the world, its policies, and, most of all, very diverse expectations on the finality of European integration. Not by chance the recent European Convention's works echoed those of the failed Frankfurt parliament of 1848, which made history as the archetype of false democracy and German disunity. The Convention's product - the draft Treaty establishing a European Constitution - even if eventually ratified, would provide some improvements to certain mechanisms within the Union, but it would not change the political nature of the Union nor the direction of its development. The prospect of transforming the European Union, even if gradually, into a European federation is now widely recognized as wishful thinking.

Since the Nineties, three times a proposal of a possible solution has been raised in the European political debate, each time pointing towards the increasing difficulties the Europeans are facing. First was the proposal of the creation of a **federation within a confederation** raised at the beginning of the Nineties by the French President Mitterrand to address the challenges of the imminent enlargement. It was neither taken into serious consideration by Germany, whose main commitment at that time was the success of its reunification, nor by Italy, whose political class collapsed under its political scandals. Second was the suggestion put forward in 1994 by CDU-CSU with the Schauble-Lamers paper to build a political **Kerneuropa** alongside the creation of the Euro. The proposal was, however, used by Germany only to put pressure on a sufficient group of EU member states to accomplish the Euro and its political dimension was soon forgotten. The most recent one occurred some years later, in 2000, once the Union had already enlarged and was on the verge of further accessions. The German Foreign Minister Fischer invited to reflect on the need of a **vanguard of countries** to build a European federation within or outside the existing treaties. France governed by President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin refused to accept the invitation and by doing so lost the chance to keep her leadership on the European project. It is high time to put these issues again on the agenda.

The enlargement of the Union and further enlargements in the coming years are not to be blamed. The enlargement of the Union to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has represented a necessary response to the request of freedom, democracy and welfare coming from the new countries and has been an important factor for Europe's stability. The same role plays today the prospect to enlarge the Union to the Balkan countries and later to Turkey. However, for those who believe that a European federation, a

European federal state, represents *the* only project able to ensure the Europeans a future of peace and prosperity, the crucial question is what is the framework in which such a project is conceivable and realistic. It is more and more common sense that this framework cannot be as broad as the twenty-seven and one day thirty or more member states of the Union. The framework where a constituent process for a European federal state can be initiated is more restricted. Possibly it will comprise the countries that are part of the Euro-zone. Most likely, it will be an even narrower group initially comprising France, Germany and some of the other founders, that could possibly be supported by some other states (most likely Spain, Slovenia, Austria), where the basic attitude of the political class and citizens make such project at least conceivable, even if immensely difficult.

## **2 – Today the federalists can still play a role only if they indicate the aim of a European federal State**

Today, UEF and its main constituent organisations are committed to a single objective: support a “constitutional treaty” through the demand of a pan-European referendum. This is a totally superfluous support, since the constitutional treaty is already promoted by a great many of national governments, political forces, organizations and pro-Europeans in general. Moreover, today everyone inside and outside the pro-European and federalist movements believes and accepts that the constitutional treaty would only provide certain improvements to the mechanisms of a wide *confederal* Union, but it would not change either the basic power relations within Europe or those between Europeans and the rest of the world, nor pave the way to a future federal union. For these reasons the current campaign of the UEF further confuses the debate on the future of Europe and on the role of the federalists. As it becomes ever more likely that the national governments will search for a solution to the current crisis of the constitutional treaty in a watered-down treaty brokered through a classical intergovernmental conference (or alternatively that they will loose control of the direction of European integration altogether) UEF should seriously and urgently reflect on what to do next.

UEF should acknowledge the need to re-launch, along with the **indirect strategy** of pursuing the progressive integration of all the European countries into a continent-wide confederal Union, a **direct strategy** to advocate a European federal State starting from a first group of countries. The aim should be to repeat, with more advanced objectives, what was successfully done by a number of federalist sections within the UEF following the entry of Great Britain into the European Common Market. At that time, and in a number of occasions thereafter, the federalist organizations have followed two strategic approaches: one direct and one indirect, each tuned according to the contexts and real possibilities of making the European battle advance in different national fronts. The direct strategy was carried out in Italy, Germany, France and Belgium and focuses on the request of the European election and later on of the European currency. The indirect strategy was followed in other countries, such as Great Britain, with campaigns aimed at requesting that the country joined the European elections, and then the European currency, when possible at a later stage, without blocking those who wanted to go ahead immediately, as well as with activities to promote federalism and the need for a federal Europe.

UEF shows a psychological resistance to abandon a campaign that appears European but it is so only in its name. This prevents UEF from launching a more effective **dual strategy**. But reality can't be ignore forever: the European Union is destined to be progressively watered-down and to abandon any dream of a United States of Europe, and even to break up, if it insists on trying to proceed with twenty-seven or more member states without resuming the project for its political unification. Therefore, UEF should set out the guidelines for: (a) a **direct strategy** to advocate the creation of the European Federal State starting from a core of countries, to be carried out by federalist groups in those countries where such core can be a serious political option, (b) an **indirect strategy** - inevitably carried forward by a greater number of federalist sections and groups - aimed at promoting the strengthening of the Union as framework of a broad continental integration centred on the single market and at promoting federalism to prepare the time when the governments and citizens of those countries could progressively join the political core. Of course nothing and nobody would forbid the latter federalist groups to give their support also to the direct strategy. After all Denis De Rougemont backed the campaign for the Congress of the European People from Geneva – a city in a country that was not even a member of the first European Communities.

The federalist movements risk entering a phase characterized by the marginality and banalisation of their role, which would closely resemble the downward trend taken in the past by other international movements, such as the pacifist movement of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the federalist movements between the two World Wars. To break away from such threat and survive as a meaningful political force, UEF needs to win the challenge to manage a strategy to advance, where possible, a confederal Europe amongst many and a strategy to give rise to a European federal state, initially among few countries.