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Two trends, in particular, are today working against European unity. The first is a trend towards protectionism, which, now spreading on a global scale, has been triggered by the growing reluctance of citizens worried about the effects of globalisation to submit meekly to the application of multilateral agreements and other solutions worked out in the ambit of the WTO, the IMF, the G8, and similar organisations. The second is a trend towards a divergence of the policies of the EU member states in the face of the impasse reached in the process of European integration, which denies the European countries a supranational framework of reference for their policies.

It is in the light of an interaction between these two regressive trends, one global and the other European (the prelude to new divisions, mistrust and discord between the states, which can only encourage *chacun pour soi* and *beggar thy neighbour* policies), that the political, economic and social malaise now present in a great many European countries can be interpreted. This malaise is clearly evident and acute also in France, Germany and Italy, that is to say, in the three largest members of the Six, which, when they founded the first European Communities, had opted for international cooperation and openness of frontiers not as ends in themselves, but as the means by which to build, gradually, a European federation.

In France, opposition to globalisation and to the European market (and to their two corollaries, liberalisation of competition and a slimming down of the welfare state) is becoming increasingly radical and threatening to make the country ungovernable. This is a protest movement that cannot simply be dismissed as *l'exception française* or as an expression of France's deep resistance to change generally. A global sense of disappointment is rife everywhere. But it is only in France that this sentiment is accompanied by fears of a progressive marginalisation of European society, and of a loss of the role of the state, in this case, a state that, born of a revolution, has contributed, in the course of its difficult and often contradictory journey, to imposing respect for men's rights, security and prosperity. Faced with the prospect of a weakening Europe, French patriotism, in its various guises, is gaining sway over a pro-European rhetoric that argues for a *Europe puissance*, but lacks the courage to fight for what this implies: the building of a European state.

In Germany, notwithstanding superficial declarations in support of the role of Europe and its institutions, the government has, for some time, been working to secure, for the German economy and German foreign policy, a stronger autonomous role on the European and international stage. Thanks to its geographical position and its production capacity, Germany has a growth potential that no other single western European country can match, or even hope to match. As a result of the country's reunification, and of favourable agreements reached, in the context of infrastructure projects in transportation and communications, as well as in the energy sector, with the countries of eastern Europe and with Russia, the German economy continues to outstrip the French and the British ones. This is confirmed by the fact that the prospects of economic recovery in Europe continue to depend not on so-called European plans so much as on the driving force transmitted by the German production system to the rest of Europe. In the ambit of foreign and security policy, Germany is clearly tempted to carve out an independent role for itself. With regard to central and eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, Germany has strengthened its position as a medium-sized regional power determined to be heard by the USA, by Russia and by China, independently of the other European countries. This political course cannot fail to

generate concerns and stir up tensions in Germany's neighbours and within German society itself. Without a European anchor to steady it, Germany's need to look for new resources and new ways of resolving the imbalances within its society, and to guarantee its security, now increasingly threatened by the instability of its eastern neighbours and by the resurgence of Russia, cannot fail to have increasingly nationalistic implications.

In Italy, as ever Europe's weak link, the results of the recent general election have revealed a country sinking deeper and deeper into a state of crisis and becoming increasingly difficult to govern. The election campaign was dominated by populism, extremism and even, on occasions, by apology of fascism. The new government finds itself immediately forced onto the defensive. First of all, it must deal with the problem of safeguarding the country's constitutional framework, as a democratic and unitary state, in order to prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. It also faces the difficult task of keeping Italy in the Eurozone. Should it fail in this task, the European Union would find itself faced with yet another profound internal crisis, without the instruments at its disposal to resolve it. An Italy in crisis would inevitably have repercussions on the rest of Europe. At the same time, no country needs to stick to the objective of European federation more than Italy does. For this reason, and given that this objective does not currently appear to be on the agenda, the country's politicians and the active forces in its civil society should make it their precise and primary concern to rekindle it, and to pursue it through coherent and credible choices and actions.

The support that is growing, in broad sections of public opinion, for certain political movements inspired by *chauvinisme* or by *Realpolitik*, as in France and Germany, or by populism, as in Italy, is, in itself, a tangible sign of the degeneration of politics in Europe.

To find a way out of this potentially explosive situation, France, Germany and Italy must take as their starting point three facts which cannot be ignored if their genuine intention is to build Europe. First, whereas the creation of a more balanced and more just world order will certainly depend, among other things, on the contribution of the Europeans (once the foundations have been laid for the creation of a European pole), *the building* of Europe, which is crucial to this purpose, depends only on the will of a small number of countries to found a European federal state. The second fact, looking beyond the rhetoric of the European institutions (according to which all the countries contribute, in equal measures, to European integration), is that the initiative of founding a new European state must necessarily involve, at least in the initial phase, France and Germany. And this leads us on to the third fact: the building of Europe will remain a possibility only for as long France and Germany continue to show an interest in deepening their bilateral cooperation and in cultivating a project of union in order to form, together, the initial core of the European federal state.

If all this is true, the fatal risk for Europe lies in a possible divergence of the policies and national interests of these two countries. It is a very real risk - one that the existence of the weak institutional framework of the European Union and the single currency does nothing to avert and that cannot be got around through the creation of a pseudo-European government in the fields of the economy or of security, based on the voluntary cooperation of the states, as some fondly imagine. For these reasons, immediate action must be taken. The time has come for the governments, the politicians, and the parliaments of France and Germany to appreciate the huge historical responsibility they bear, whether they decide to promote (through a clear initiative) or to prevent (simply by not acting at all) the creation of a European federal state. It is up to the governments, politicians and parliaments of the other countries, starting with Italy and Europe's other founder member states, to encourage this awareness and to channel it in the direction of a European federal outcome.

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