

September 2006

The European Council's decision, reached on June 15<sup>th</sup>, to prolong until 2008 the period of reflection upon the question of institutional reforms provides yet another demonstration of the fact that the European Union, paralysed by internal contradictions, is increasingly incapable of action. Not even the urgent problems created by the rapidly degenerating international situation, which is threatening the vital interests of our continent too, are able to jolt it into finding instruments that will allow it to act; the Israel-Lebanon situation has shown, once again, that each European state pursues a narrow, national policy, never going further than to seek – at most – forms of collaboration with the other member states.

In the face of this structural weakness, the solutions proposed (that of the so-called Europe of projects, or Europe of results), like the expedients used in order to bring Constitutional Treaty into force, clearly cannot work, as events will show: the European Union will find some means through which it can adopt the new institutional mechanisms provided for by the so-called constitution, but will then proceed to function very much as it did before; in the same way, it will not make significant progress as regards the "Europe of results" not so much because the "rules" are lacking, as because there exists, at European level, no sovereign power, independent of the national powers, that can take the decisions needed and implement them.

The failures, or the absences, of the European Union are often blamed on a lack of willingness on the part of the single member states. But, as history teaches us, this is never the only problem within an organisation of states. Let us consider, for example, the United States of America. Today, Belgian prime minister Verhofstadt, drawing a parallel between the USA and the EU, quite rightly remarks "just imagine the United States of America with one currency – the dollar – and one central bank – the Federal Reserve Board – but 50 different social and economic policies, one for every state. We would say that such a situation is 'unwieldy'. But it is exactly that unwieldy situation that we are facing today in the European Union, at least in the euro zone". It is thus necessary to ask another question: what is it that allows the United States to have a unitary social and economic policy? Willingness on the part of the states, or the existence of a continental federal power? Why is it that under the rules of the Articles of Confederation the thirteen American colonies found themselves caught in an ever-worsening crisis, yet after creating the Federation proved able to tackle and resolve their problems?

The fact is that what Europe lacks today is an effective state power organised on a federal basis. The building of Europe has reached a crossroads and it is not only wrong, but in fact dangerous, to labour under the illusion that there is still progress to be made along the route of the old Community method. This method has allowed a deep level of economic integration, imposing rules and policies that restrict the national action of the member states; but at the same time, it rests on the sovereignty of the states in the last instance. This makes it impossible to introduce common policies in all those sectors where decisions can be taken only by a power directly legitimated by the citizens. In the Community framework, in which popular consensus is formed at national level, single social and economic, fiscal, and foreign and security policies are a structural impossibility. Yet it is precisely this contradiction that, at the level of public opinion,

underlies today's growing disillusionment with the European Union. On the one hand, European interference in the different countries' internal matters is often felt to stem from a "bureaucracy" that is subject to no democratic control; on the other, the lack of European policies in key sectors prevents the European Union from responding to the needs of the citizens, from defending a level of security, wellbeing and quality of life that, justifiably, they feel to be threatened in the current world situation.

It was implicit, when it was adopted, that the Community method would ultimately produce these contradictions: it was, indeed, intended as a transitory phase that would prepare the ground for political unification. Its initiators, starting with Monnet, were perfectly aware of the fact that it was *the instrument* through which to overcome the states and governments' deep reluctance to relinquish their competences and powers, but that it would not solve the problem of transferring sovereignty from national to European level. With the creation of the single currency, which is the last step possible in a process of gradual integration, the Community method completed its instrumental function, and it has now become *an obstacle* to the creation of a European federal state.

Today, also as a result of the EU's enlargement, the community method, the institutions it has produced and the decision-making mechanisms for which it makes provision, are able to manage the progressive integration of the new members and indeed the co-existence of those who do not want to progress beyond an "economic" vision of Europe. But those who genuinely believe in the need for a political Europe must abandon this route and have the courage to acknowledge that, within the ambit of the present European institutions, any battle for a European federation is inevitably a losing one. Indeed, the decision-making mechanisms themselves prevent the adopting of federal reforms because the approval of such reforms demands the consensus (through their relinquishment of the power of veto) of those states that are rigidly opposed to them. Consequently, anyone who still sees the current European framework as a point of reference is forced to come up with proposals that are, in truth, fanciful or totally ineffective. The only way to create a political Europe is to abandon the logic of advance by stages, which banks on the possibility that Europe can evolve and strengthen gradually, and instead to aim to build, outside the framework of the existing treaties, a federal state made up of Europe's founder member countries – first and foremost France, Germany and Italy – and of any other countries that should wish to be part of the project from the outset. Efforts to improve the EU's Community and intergovernmental mechanisms may be useful only if they are accompanied by an awareness, first of all, that their sole aim is to promote more efficient management of the 25-member union (which structurally cannot fulfil a political role), and by a recognition that the whole structure of the Union, if it is to have a future, must be anchored to the federal design of its founding fathers and that this design, for the time being, can be pursued only by a vanguard of states.

It is therefore up to the parties and governments in favour of European unity to draw a clear distinction between participation in the life of the Union and its institutions – which is important, always recognising their confederal function – and the action needed to re-launch the European project on federal bases. It is only by keeping these two spheres separate that the true nature of the difficulties currently paralysing the European mechanism can be appreciated, and the steps taken to ensure that Europe makes the definitive leap forward towards federation.

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