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“It is helpful to recall the problem at the heart of the issue of integration, which is the conceptual schism among the member states. Contradictory and irreconcilable attitudes toward the future of Europe collide. Whereas some construe the idea of the “United States of Europe” as a survival strategy for the continent, others are keen to emphasize that they have merely joined an internal market. This profound disagreement over the EU’s ultimate direction threatens to abruptly end the success story of European integration. The basic consensus over European integration policy is a thing of the past. The arguments are ostensibly about treaty texts, though deep down it is a matter of antagonistic views of the shape of things to come. If it proves impossible to reach some kind of agreement about the future political order of the continent, the Europe of 25 and soon more member states may well go into decline, and may possibly even fall apart. This problem cannot be resolved until the issue has been openly discussed.”

This is the opening premise of *Europe’s Strategic Responses*, the paper prepared by the policy research centre of the Bertelsmann Foundation that provided the source of inspiration for Germany’s broad development of the programme for its forthcoming presidency of the European Union. The paper was presented last September at an international forum held at the German foreign ministry in Berlin, and attended by representatives of the governments of the various EU member states. So, the European federalists are clearly not the only ones concerned about the existence of profound contradictions within the process of European integration; this is, in fact, a reality of which the most attentive political leaders and government representatives are very much aware. But it is a reality that the responses contained in the Bertelsmann report, and indeed in the programme for the German presidency, do not appear to take into account, given that these documents advance proposals that can be set within the traditional framework of gradual development of the European process – proposals that promote the ratification of a new Treaty and further differentiated integration scenarios, in particular, a European army, as though wishing to attempt to square attitudes earlier defined “contradictory and irreconcilable”.

The European federalists and, in general, all those who recognise the urgent need to create the United States of Europe are duty bound to intervene in this debate and express their views on the choices that the governments intend to make, so as to help to clarify the alternatives before us. These choices boil down to three different problems, which may be summarised in as many questions: A) Is safeguarding the Treaties and preserving the *acquis communautaire* enough to guarantee the European project a future?; B) Can the member states wishing to form the United States of Europe simply integrate with one another, or must they, at last, formally unite?; C) Is the creation of a European army a viable option without the formation of a European state? These questions demand answers that are clear and completely uncluttered by false or deceptive solutions.

A – The concern of those who wish to preserve the *acquis communautaire* expressed in the Treaties is understandable and justified, because the *acquis* provides the minimum institutional framework needed in order to maintain a level of cooperation that has now become, for the European states, their economies, and their societies, indispensable and impossible to surrender. For this reason, it is in the interests of all the states to adopt a new treaty, a somewhat slimmed down version of the European Constitutional Treaty, embellished by the addition of the odd solemn declaration and additional protocol: a treaty that would basically amend the Nice Treaty and simplify the complex European machinery. And the sooner they do this, the better, because otherwise it is all too easy to imagine an indefinite prolonging of a “pause for reflection” during which, given the ambiguous nature of the object of this reflection – a Constitution that is not a constitution and that has no state as a point of reference –, the growing seeds of mutual mistrust between the governments and the states, and of disillusionment with the European project on the part of public opinion in the different states, will weaken irretrievably the consensus that is needed not only in order to advance the European project, but also to preserve the Europe that already exists.

Adopting a modified Nice Treaty, or whatever it might be called, will serve the purpose of getting Europe moving again, but it must be done on the basis of an acknowledgement of two clear facts: first, that taking this step represents confirmation that twenty-seven member states are committed to preserving a framework of European cooperation; and second, that these states, together, do not want to, or cannot, go any further than this. It will amount to recognising that such a treaty, in order to be agreed upon and accepted by all, postpones *sine die* any federal-type reform of the European institutions – in other words, it will be an open acknowledgement that, for an indefinite period of time, there will exist no European power to manage the continent’s economy and foreign and security policy. And when this point is reached, the governments and the countries that really do want to save Europe – if they want to be consistent and credible – will have to consider in concrete terms how to go beyond the Treaties.

B – This brings us to the second alternative facing the countries that are considering the problem of how to save Europe. Today, it is no longer a choice between whether to integrate more or less rapidly, according to mutually agreed rules; instead, it has become a choice between political unification and continued division. To go on fragmenting the process of European integration into an almost endless series of stages, formulas for cooperation, and groupings of member states, is to renounce the pursuit of European unification as the final objective. A multi-speed Europe, a Europe of differentiated integration, has long been a concrete feature of European construction, and there are several examples of it: the Benelux arrangement, which predated the birth of the Common Market, the Eurozone in the monetary field, and the Schengen agreement in that of free circulation. The real challenge today is, instead, to bring about the formation of a federal political union that, initially at least, will comprise *a small number of countries*, and of enabling this to co-exist with the confederal Union of *many countries*, integrating at different rates, that already does exist. This challenge can successfully be overcome only if two conditions are met. First, some governments and politicians will have to abandon the strategy of gradualism, or of small steps. This strategy helped to bring the European countries to the threshold of political unity, but it is not enough to take them over that threshold. Second, it must be recognised that while the existence of a federation within a confederation of states undoubtedly poses certain problems of a technical-legal nature, the experts will be able to resolve these problems efficiently *only after* a group of governments and countries has actually taken the decision to unite.

C – The need to create a European army is a pressing one. One need only think of the instability of the countries formerly under the influence of the Soviet Union, an area that extends from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, the problems of the greater Middle East, which extends from Egypt to Afghanistan, and those of much of Africa (to mention only those regions closest to the borders of the EU), and it is immediately clear that the European countries shoulder enormous responsibility for the safeguarding not only of their own interests, but also of world peace. From this point of view, integration and enlargement are processes that can lay the foundations for peaceful cooperation between countries that still find themselves immersed in profoundly different historical and social realities, but that cannot guarantee the level of security that is needed in order to render this cooperation stable, to protect it, and to give it the time it needs to become firmly established. Europe's integration was able to begin and to develop only because the six founder member states' security, both military and in terms of energy and trade flows, was guaranteed by its ally, the United States of America. But since western Europe is no longer at the centre of the USA's global strategies, it is now up to the Europeans to take care of their own security. Some governments have realised this quite clearly and hence there is once again talk of a European army.

Foreign and security policy is the area in which the impossibility of advancing by stages can be seen most clearly. Here, it is a choice between, on the one hand, maintaining a number of armies and national industrial-military apparatuses, which at most may cooperate with one another, but which ultimately answer to the respective national governments, and, on the other, creating a European army under the command of a European General Staff, which answers to a European government. The failure of the EDC demonstrated, over half a century ago, that the army is not an instrument through which the European federal state might later be created; on the contrary, it showed that the European federal state is the only instrument through which it is truly possible to organise Europe's defence and foreign policy, the latter being an inseparable aspect of defence.

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Given the enormous changes that we are seeing in the new world order, and the serious environmental and economic problems that the world now faces, it is clear that the Europeans do not have much time left in which they can delay making their choices. For the third time in the past hundred years, they find themselves in the point of having to reckon with the consequences of their failure to make certain decisions. In the past, the consequences of this failure were the two world wars. With regard to the immediate future, it is not possible to say how the effects of the growing imbalances between the different continents will manifest themselves (imbalances seen in military and environmental terms, as well as in terms of wellbeing and justice). The Europeans can decide to limit themselves to keeping *only* the Europe of the Treaties, in the mistaken belief that by so doing they are protecting themselves, for as long as possible, from the effects of the next crises. But if they do this, it is easy to imagine that at the first sign of danger, each state will try, by itself and with scant concern for its neighbours, to save its own skin, thereby aggravating further the European and international situation. Or they can start to build, *as well*, a Europe founded on a federal pact, initially entered into by its six founder member states led by France and Germany, thereby creating the first core of a European federal state. They must lay the foundations on which to build the European power essential to their continent's security and development, and that will enable them, together with the world's other regional poles, to prevent international anarchy from prevailing. This is the only way of guaranteeing Europe a future.

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