

July 2009

On September 1st, 1994, during Germany's six-month presidency of the EU, Wolfgang Schäuble, president of the CDU/CSU group in the German parliament, presented to the *Bundestag*, on behalf of his party, a document he had drawn up together with Karl Lamers. Entitled "Reflections on European Policy", this was a paper, and indeed an initiative, that marked one of the high points in European political debate. At the time (just after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and German reunification and just before Europe's enlargement towards the East), the European unification process had entered a "critical phase", as authors of the paper put it, so critical that, "if, within the next two to four years no solution is found to the causes of this worrying evolution, the Union, instead of moving towards the greater convergence envisaged by the Maastricht Treaty, risks finding itself moving inexorably towards a weaker configuration, with competence, essentially, only for certain economic questions and divided into different combinations of countries. An 'improved' free trade area like this would not allow European society to overcome the vital problems and external challenges it faces". The institutional and political measures that Schäuble and Lamers suggested in order to prevent this drift concerned, primarily, the institutional development of the Union, whose capacity to act and democratic foundations needed to be strengthened through the adoption of a federal state-type system, developed in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity; this would have to be accompanied, "notwithstanding the legal and practical difficulties", by an institutionalisation of the idea of a multispeed Europe – "otherwise the Union will remain confined to intergovernmental cooperation, which encourages a 'Europe à la carte' " – and a strengthening of the "hard core already formed by those countries that are committed to integration and willing to cooperate". The fact that this same core, comprising France, Germany and the Benelux countries, also emerged in the monetary field was considered very important by the two authors of the paper, given that they saw EMU as the core of the future political Union; furthermore, strengthening this core was seen as the only way of reconciling two opposing objectives: a deepening and a widening of the European Union.

The driving force of these initiatives should really have been Germany, primarily, given that it was up to Germany to advance adequate proposals for the intergovernmental conference on Treaty reform due to take place in 1996 and, more important, to strive for a stronger understanding with France in this regard. The various priority objectives included the need to equip Europe with a foreign and defence policy capable of guaranteeing the Continent's security, given that "the ability to defend itself is the very essence of a state's sovereignty...; moreover, since a people's awareness of its sovereignty shapes not only its internal but also its external relations, the common defence capability of this European community of states must be seen as a crucial factor in conferring a sense of identity on the EU".

Now, fifteen years since the CDU/CSU (then Germany's governing party) issued its position statement, we can draw some conclusions relating to the hypotheses it contained: in relation to the creation of EMU, the paper proved extremely useful because it provided a demonstration that Germany was determined, regardless, to move forwards with a vanguard group, even if it meant leaving behind a co-founding member state like Italy which, at the time, looked unlikely to meet the criteria for joining the single currency. It was, indeed, this strong demonstration of Germany's clear and unshakeable will that made the birth of the euro possible. As for the other parts of the Schäuble-Lamers proposal, the fact that nothing they wished to see has been achieved only goes to confirm the extremely lucid and farsighted analysis from which the proposal itself sprang. Europe today is exactly as Schäuble and Lamers said it would be if it failed to grow in strength and endow itself with a political identity: basically resigned to its own slow decline, without the ambitions it once had and caught in a situation of dangerous impotence and weakness.

One of the main factors contributing to this profound change in the nature of the European Union was, as Schäuble and Lamers predicted, its enlargement to its current 27 members, which, since this process was not accompanied by a deepening of the political ties between the more

closely integrated countries, favoured the design of those (the UK first and foremost) that wanted to see the EU turned into an “ ‘improved’ free trade area”. The Europe that has emerged from all of this, characterised by its marked heterogeneity, has exposed the inadequacies of the Community edifice, not so much because it has hindered the normal functioning of its institutions (even though it has added to the confusion), but rather and above all because it has made it impossible for Europe to grow stronger and to evolve (as shown by the limits of the Nice Treaty, the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, and the tortuous and still ongoing advance of the Lisbon Treaty). In short, this heterogeneity is encouraging the formation of blocs of opposing interests, based on the geopolitical position of the different countries, and creating the conditions for, among other things, a dangerous divergence of French and Germany policy in a number of areas.

In this context, whenever there is a crisis the question of a multispeed Europe inevitably arises, given that this solution is, indisputably, the only one capable of getting the Union out of its present state of paralysis. But since the idea that deeper integration demands a transfer of sovereignty from the states to Europe has now been abandoned, the proposals advanced by the national governments all revolve around the concept of enhanced or structured cooperations, a complex and inefficient mechanism that cannot equip Europe with the instruments it needs in order to rise to the challenges of the future: indeed, such cooperations (in order to come into being and survive) demand the more or less explicit consent of *all* the member states, even those not intending to participate; this makes it quite impossible for Europe not only to tackle properly the problems of foreign and security policy, which call for a federal leap forwards, but also to complete the process of economic union (and without a full economic union the Europeans are destined to go on remaining divided also in the face of emergencies like the current, dramatic financial crisis). In accordance with Schäuble and Lamers’ warnings, European society, as a result of all this, lacks the instruments to “overcome the crucial problems and external challenges it faces”.

The results of the recent European elections provide ample confirmation of this analysis. The citizens feel increasingly disenchanted with *this* Europe: in the eurosceptic countries because they have no faith in it; in those in favour of a political Europe, on the other hand, because the European Union fails to meet their expectations. While surveys show that most of the citizens of Europe’s founding member states, and not only of these states, still want a European federation, the election results show that this same majority fails to see why it must vote for a parliament that, rather than representing the interests of the European people, merely confines itself to setting rules within the political framework established by the nation-states that they perceive as weak and impotent. The European Parliament deals with a great many technical questions, but it cannot intervene in economic and foreign policy, or be part of any true form of government of the Union.

The European elections also drew attention to another, even more serious, aspect: the cost of “non-Europe”. The European citizens are fearful of change because their countries are incapable of protecting them, of defending their interests and of offering them a credible project for their future. They fear the predominance of the rest of the world, the immigration that, by creating competition among the poor, is adding to the difficulties of those who are already on the fringes of society, and the fragility of a social and welfare system that has been thrown into crisis by this evolution of global processes. These problems are real and to attempt to exorcise the fears they arouse through recourse to the kind of populist rhetoric and responses that are now taking hold in many European countries serves only set oneself up for a more dramatic reawakening, when the survival of democracy, in the weaker countries at least, really will hang by a thread. Moreover, the national framework offers no solutions that might allow these challenges to be governed, and even turned into new opportunities.

The project that the CDU/CSU presented to the *Bundestag* in 1994 has thus lost none of its relevance fifteen years on. However, in a Europe with 27 members, the majority now eurosceptic, and with European society increasingly trapped by the inadequacy of national policies and the deficiencies of the EU, it has become much more difficult to realise. But these difficulties cannot and must not be allowed to stand in the way of those who are committed to opposing the decline of our society and its values. On the contrary, they provide an extra reason to remind the politicians and governments of Europe’s founding member states that it is their responsibility to promote, *without delay*, the founding of the federal core that they chose not to create a decade and a half ago.

Publius

Under the auspices of the Mario and Valeria Albertini Foundation

Editrice EDIF, via Villa Glori, 8 - I-27100 Pavia - E-mail: publius@euraction.org
Direttore responsabile Elio Cannillo - Autorizzazione Tribunale di Pavia n. 575 del 9 settembre 2002
Stampatore PIME SRL, Pavia - Poste Italiane s.p.a., Spedizione in Abbonamento Postale D.L. 353/2003
(conv. in L. 27/02/2004 n. 46) art. 1, comma 2, DCB Pavia
www.euraction.org