# A European Federal State to Give the Citizens Control of their Destiny Again

traditional opposition between confederation and federation, since, in its definitive form, the European Union will represent a totally new political entity, which will be neither one of these things nor the other. The question of sovereignty is thus made to disappear as if by magic, since it is not ascribed to the national states (as would be the case were the Union to become a confederation) nor to Europe (as would be the case were it to become a federation). Yet as sovereignty disappears, other things are lost too: the ultimate point of reference for popular consensus, the bond created by the awareness of belonging to a single community of destiny and, therefore, the very idea of citizenship. This is a direction that leads, logically, to the eclipse of politics as the pursuit of the common good and the end of democracy. And by following it, the European Union becomes the embodiment of the idea that the crisis of the state and of politics is irreversible and the codification of an alternative, and ruinous, form of society that keeps states divided and powerless.

The European states bear a heavy responsibility for their failure, thus far, to federate. Federation could have represented, and still could represent, not only the possibility to fill the power vacuum that has been created in Europe, but, even more, a model for the rest of world of a new form of statehood for the 21$^{st}$ century. It is clear that the birth of a European federal state would create the conditions for a more stable world balance and give the Europeans the possibility, once more, of effectively influencing world choices; furthermore, as the completion of a process of unification among sovereign nation-states, it would serve as a model for the creation of other regional states in other parts of the world. Given the present EU's lack of political prospects, the responsibility for advancing in this direction, through the founding of an initial federal core, made up of a limited number of states but open to all those that should subsequently wish to be part of it, rests first of all with the founding countries, whose political life has been profoundly influenced by more than fifty years of integration and for which the federal perspective has been a constant point of reference.

### The crisis of the state

Throughout the world, the state, intended as the organisation of a people on a territory for the pursuit of the common good, has entered a profound crisis. The process of globalisation is undermining the territorial basis of human relations, and taking more and more functions away from the state, transferring them, instead, to regional groups and international organisations with weak institutional structures and no effective democratic control. An assortment of global networks now allows – indeed favours – the circulating of information, the carrying out of transactions, and the exchanging of services on the basis of interests of a purely sectorial nature; consequently, choices are now made and decisions are now taken in the absence, at any point, of mediation through either politics or, in particular, the democratic institutions.

Together with the state, the very idea of legitimacy has been thrown into crisis and replaced by a muddle of rules from different sources whose content is often contradictory. Hence the widespread sense of uncertainty and insecurity among citizens and the increasing lack of confidence in democratic institutions and in politicians, which is evident everywhere in the word but particularly in western Europe. Institutions, as the bodies responsible for pursuing the general interest, are tending to be replaced by an ill-defined distribution of power, giving rise to a situation in which all clear points of reference for consensus are slowly disappearing; at the same time, borders are progressively losing their significance as the territorial demarcations both of the exercising of sovereignty and of areas in which relations among citizens can be organised according to precise rules and responsibility for fundamental choices can be clearly attributed.

This trend is being accompanied by an apparently opposing one, which seems to seek to compensate for the indifference to collective values and for the social and cultural upheaval brought about by this crisis. It takes the form of an exaggerated heightening of real or presumed "community" identities, ethnic, religious or cultural, and its aim is to restore to individuals a sense of belonging to a group, united by deep ties; in other words, an awareness of being part of a "we" that relieves them of solitude and of responsibility. This is the common feature of today's religious fundamentalisms, of the closed communities that are undermining the unity of American society, of the micro-nationalism of the separatist movements in eastern and

western Europe, and of the sects that are flourishing in all parts of the world. Yet these movements, born as reactions to globalisation, display in practice features of the very trend which they believe themselves to be opposing: indeed, they have no clear links with a territory – this is also true of the micro-nationalist movements which, because of the transient and contradictory nature of the "ethnic" claims on which they are based, work exclusively as factors contributing to the disintegration of existing state structures; at the same time, they make no attempt to develop their own idea of the common good and instead confine themselves to arousing instincts of a tribal nature, thereby encouraging the exercise of violence. They are, in short, signs of a serious crisis afflicting politics and the democratic institutions.

Therefore, on the one hand, the global information society, by its *de facto* overcoming of the state as the natural framework of political debate conducted with a view to furthering the general interest, represses all dialogue which is not confined to the exchange of data for the promotion of particular interests; on the other hand, the development of the "community" phenomenon, in its various expressions, negates the legitimacy of the concept of the general interest, by subordinating it to the violent assertion of "identities" that are ambiguous and incapable of engaging in dialogue. All this presages a situation in which the disappearance of the very ideas of sovereignty and the common good will be the prem-

ise for the development of widespread and generalised violence and thus of a sense of insecurity, co-existing with the sterile and impersonal reality of the global information networks.

The absence of democratic institutions able to govern the globalisation process is at the root of this crisis, which is leading to the paradoxical situation whereby institutions almost devoid of popular legitimacy are used by national politicians to impose on democratic bodies decisions that would not otherwise be accepted.

### Europe: an unfinished construction

So, there can be no doubt that the globalisation process, particularly in its current phase, has led to a profound crisis of politics and of the state. Yet this crisis is not the crisis of the state *tout court*, but of a historical form of state, limited to a territorial area that no longer corresponds to society's dimensions and needs. This means that the crisis of politics is not definitive or beyond the remedial intervention of conscious human will.

Supine and "pragmatic" acceptance of the crisis, as in resignation to an unavoidable situation, cannot be the right response; what is needed, rather, is a conscious decision to allow mankind, once again, to take control of his collective choices. And this can be achieved only by expanding the dimensions of the state to global level: the federal organisation of democracy on a continental scale is possible, as the experience of the United States of America since the end of

the 18th century has shown. There is no reason to believe that the same thing should not be possible today, starting in Europe and then spreading to other regions of the world until a world federation is achieved. Similarly, there is no reason to believe that mankind, instead of giving in to the brutality of tribalism, should not be able, albeit through a long and difficult process, to organise co-habitation peacefully over a range of differently-sized territorial communities, in which all people can regain a deep sense of belonging based on a universal civil commitment to the solving of common problems according to the rules of democracy.

Today the political conditions for achieving world federation are clearly lacking. Yet a first step in this direction could be taken through the creation of a partial world government, made up of a limited number of regional states which would have to be large enough and sufficiently similar in size to make possible, and to enforce, agreements that, reflecting the choices of their citizens, would allow economic processes and relations between men to be submitted to a form of control that more closely reflects the interests of everyone.

The European Union might, from this perspective, be regarded as a groundbreaker. It was born out of the awareness that the nation-states were ill-equipped to manage, in a democratic, peaceful and efficient way, the growing interdependence of human relations and of means of production brought about by the technological revolution. This awareness made

it possible to start a process that, in the vision of Europe's founding fathers, was meant to culminate in the transfer of sovereignty from the nation-states, which had become obsolete, to a true federal state. Yet, in the course of the process and as a consequence of repeated enlargements, this ultimate objective has faded from view and no longer drives the action of the European political class. Nowadays, in fact, the citizens increasingly regard the European Union as a bureaucratic machine over which they have no influence and that is incapable of promoting their true interests and of guaranteeing them the security they feel they need.

In recent years, many people have even been tending to fall back on the idea that the building of Europe is not a political problem but a technical one, which does not demand the democratic mobilisation of the citizens. This attitude is clearly apparent in the deep reluctance to acknowledge that the construction of Europe *must bring about the foundation of a new state, with the transfer of sovereignty from the nation-states to Europe*. Only this reluctance can explain why an eminent European and prominent champion of European integration like Jacques Delors should define the European Union as "an unidentified political object"; only this reluctance can explain the numerous theories through which political observers have underlined the institutional "novelty" of the European Union. And it is this same attitude of resistance that underpins the widely-accepted idea that, in Europe's case, there is no longer any reason for the