

Should the EU develop into a United States of Europe?

Written by Patrycja Skurzak

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PATRYCJA SKURZAK, FEB 8 2011

Twentieth century Europe, sculpted by the two most devastating conflicts in the humankind history, countless numbers of deaths and ongoing disputes between the European neighbours, was certainly calling for a rapid change. This change, preceded by many unsuccessful attempts, finally arrived with the glorious ideal of an 'Even Closer Union' between the European states, quoted for the first time in 1957 by the preamble of the Treaty of Rome. The transformation was to be developed through the process of 'evolution by which formerly hostile nation states would be drawn together until they could become integrated in a single political, economic and social entity' (Welsh, 1996:1).

These initial visions of united Europe were influenced primarily by the federalist ideas, which necessitated an establishment of the European federation in order to avoid future tensions and uphold peaceful relations. The view was particularly endorsed by the anti-fascist European Resistance Members, such as Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, who gave emphasis to the need of a clear transfer of the political authority from national governments to one central body (Spinelli in George, 2001:4). The initiative of a Federal Europe was also addressed by Winston Churchill in his renowned speech delivered on the 9th of September 1946, when he acknowledged that 'we must build a kind of United States of Europe (USE) as we see nothing but good and hope in a richer, freer, more contented European commonality' (Churchill, 1946). The federalist ideal of an 'Even Closer Europe', considered as the fundamental inspiration for the European integration, continued to remain the motive force behind the formation of the European Union (EU).

The present-day image of the EU, rather far from resembling the original idea of federation, can be defined as a 'political, economic, social and legal hybrid with a combination of federal, confederal, supranational and intergovernmental features' (Winer, 2004:40). Some scholars believe that this came to be the final stage in the process of integration as culminated by the recent adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Along these lines, many Euro-sceptics and anti-federalists strongly advocate that the EU will never fit into the federal system, for it is highly unrealistic and improbable. The prominent failure in establishing the European Constitution has already proved this point. Yet, on the other hand, pro-European activists continue to support the concept of centralised and united Europe. Highlighting numerous benefits that the EU has to offer as well as the advantages of the federal system, they call for the development of the USE for the betterment of all its inhabitants.

Should the EU grow into the USE? Will it ever be successful in accommodating federal social and economic arrangements? Is there enough political will for more manoeuvre towards federalism in a highly diversified and differentiated Europe? In the light of the robust debate on the subject matter, the essay will attempt to tackle some of the questions presented in order to investigate whether the EU should develop into the USE. The paper will display and analyse converging arguments in order to obtain an objective focus in the discussion. It will conclude by offering a few potential visions of the future of European integration.

At the beginning it seems relevant to indicate that, according to many historians, the original idea of 'the Founding Fathers', to create the federal USE with the 'constitutional rule-making supranational authority that divides the power between federal, national and local authorities', was considered to be the only means to achieve peace and prosperity (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006:20). Immanuel Kant, for example, advocated that the 'expanding federation is the most appropriate constitutional safeguard against the threat of war' (Kant in Forsyth, 1996:33). It thus seems that

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the vision of federal Europe was justifiably promoted by the European governments after the Second World War. Yet, a question pertains whether this original aspiration appears relevant today when the fear of war is long eradicated? Pinder insists that federalism still continues to be important in understanding the modern challenges and dilemmas of the states and will remain to be a valid framework for designing the 'international solutions to international problems' (in Eilsrup-Sangiovanni, 2006:23). The writer goes on to suggest that the ongoing European integration and the growing interdependence between states will ultimately lead to the strengthening of the formation of a federal union (2006:23). While McKay even remarks that the adoption of the common currency among 11 European states on the 1st of January 1999 has already paved the way for the creation of the United Federal Europe (1999:1). This argument draws a parallel to the concept of 'spillover' advocated by the theory of neofunctionalism. It assumes that the logic of the Single European Market will unavoidably necessitate an ever closer economic and monetary union alongside further political integration (Smith, 1995:280). As it can be observed, the case for federalisation in Europe will be an essential factor in understanding large-scale geopolitical problems. One can therefore suggest that it should be taken into account with a certain dose of significance when considering the future of the EU. This stance appears somewhat unavoidable and rational, not least because, as McKay and Smith argue, the pro-federal progression has already commenced. Whether or not the USE should after all take the tangible form will follow from further investigation.

According to George, the vision of the USE presupposes a federal system defined by a clear transfer of the political authority from national governments into one central supranational organization, where at least 'two levels of government coexist with each other, having independent functions but neither having a supreme authority over the other' (2001:4; McCormick, 2008:16). It is frequently pleaded, particularly by the pro-European organizations such as the Union of European Federalists or the Young European Federalists, that the European states should undertake such transfer of power. The case made is that supranational board would be in best position to work towards the goal of creating 'peaceful and democratic federal Europe that guarantees freedom and protection of human rights' by uniting in diversity (Union of European Federalists, 27/11/2010). One can indicate that this transfer should develop as a particular response to the growing criticism of the EU with regards to the issues of democratic deficit, insufficient transparency and lack of accountability. European institutions should undergo comprehensive reforms and further moving towards the federal direction could ensure that. A good case in this point is put forward by Welsh who argues that there is something profoundly undemocratic in the decision-making process of the EU today, as it is based on the choice of appointed judges rather than elected representatives. As he goes on to suggest, this adds in consequence to the 'broader de-parliamentarization and erosion of parliamentary control over executive office-holders' (1996:30; Ladrech, 2010:71). Fact that national parliaments are not involved to a sufficient extent in the routine decision-making process at the EU level is yet another example to the point. Further reforms towards greater cohesion, harmony and mutual engagement among European states are not only necessary, but, as it seems, rather fundamental. The constitutional reforms introduced by the Lisbon Treaty provide for the most relevant illustration. Not only does the Treaty systematise pan-european socio-legal situation, but also enhances the role of national parliaments in the policy-making process and, for the first time in the history of the European Union, officially extends its protective hand over democratization and protection of human rights processes. Indeed, Article 6 of the Treaty elevates Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union into the legally-binding document of the Union. One must therefore pinpoint that the concept of a greater unity and synchronization in the European Union does bring certain and justifiable weight to the discussion on the future of the organisation. This input cannot be disregarded.

Moreover, many commentators believe that since the 'strength of the state identity has been undermined and international borders have become weakened by the process of globalisation' there is an urgent need for the centralisation of power under one supranational body (McCormick, 2008:3). Likewise, Ernst Haas, prominent neofunctionalism theorist, observed that states are no longer capable of realizing welfare aims within their borders and, as a consequence, citizens gradually shift their loyalties from national governments to the supranational arena (Haas in Hix, 2005:16). According to federalists, such an 'erosion of sovereignty' can only be tackled by common policies of federalism based on 'democratic accountability, transparency, separation of powers, fair representation of all citizens and member states, efficiency and effectiveness' (Union of European Federalists, 27/11/2010). It therefore seems that more federal Europe would signify a 'clearer division of competence, a European Constitution with a set of fundamental rights, perhaps with a bicameral parliament and a democratically elected government' (Romberg, 2003:226).

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Furthermore, it is interesting to remark that some scholars frequently put an example of the United States of America as the prominent evidence of how beneficial and prosperous federal system can become. Rosamond, for instance, comments that this case clearly demonstrates 'practical possibilities of the application of the federal principles to the system composed of diverse units' (2000:25). The writer advocates federation as the most appropriate constitutional framework which effectively provides for the balance between sufficient units of autonomy and the overarching authority in the pursuing of common objectives (2000:25). By the same token, Germany or Switzerland stand out as yet another set of remarkable examples of how 'multinational, multilingual and multicultural federal unions can survive and sustain impressive level of unity built upon federal principles' (Winer, 2004:27). As it can be commented, these instances give a clear demonstration of the ability to enjoy democracy and economic growth, while at the same time preserving the autonomy of the regional states (McKay 2001:27). The EU should thus continue its integration by adopting more federal principles. Indeed, as it appears, the federal system would successfully integrate differences in Europe, accommodating ethnic and cultural divisions (Winer, 2004:29).

Another significant argument is that the European integration has produced a number of economic benefits across the member states and they include, to name the few, significant raise in the level of national employment rates, improvement of the trade relations, guarantees of the freedom of movement and travel, decrease in the costs of the goods and services (Fligstein, 2008:245). Lane, for example, finds out that the single currency has significantly influenced financial markets across the euro zone increasing the level of healthy competition and trading activities. This has as a result led to massive reductions in transaction costs, improvements in market access for higher-risk borrowers and greater financial innovation (2006:52). Others commentators indicate that Euro has also greatly enhanced direct investment projects between member states, estimating that it 'has raised flows of foreign direct investment between 1982 and 2002 by 62%' (De Sousa in Lane, 2006:53). The enormous economic expansion allowed many people to think of themselves as being part of a better European community what consequently boosted the level of support for a more federal Europe. In fact, it is predicted that in 20 years time nearly 70% of the European citizens will think of themselves as Europeans and this will make them interact more often with people from other countries, increasing their awareness of different cultures. Along these lines, Risse demonstrates the remarkable effect that Euro had in constructing strong European support. The author declares that the 'backing for Euro remains extraordinarily high in Euro-land thanks to the economic benefits and overall majorities of public opinion are both happy with it and consider it as advantageous for the future of their country' (Risse, 2003:492).

In the light of the above arguments, one might observe that further European integration can be seen as a desirable development for several well-grounded reasons. Not only would it make the cooperation between states easier and more effective so that to eradicate international problems, it would also have a critical impact on the economic, political and social security among the confederates (McCormick, 2008:1). The above-mentioned arguments, although concisely, have confirmed the rationalisation of the EU by pinpointing to its benefits. In this view, one is attracted to support the concept of the USE.

On the other hand, however, there are still strong arguments casting certain doubt over whether and to what extend the model of the USE can possibly fit into the practical image of the EU as it is today.

To start with, it should be mentioned that the liberal intergovernmental perspective seems to provide one of the most dubious approaches towards the European integration. It assumes that national governments, powerful and sovereign international actors, possess the sole control of the nature and pace of the integration process and, because of their overriding self-interests, they are highly unlikely to further pool their sovereignty in the name of the federal Europe (George, 2004:5). Similarly, Hix points out that 'the main aim of the national governments is to protect their geopolitical interests such as national security and sovereignty' rather than to fight for the common interests under the umbrella of federalism (Hix, 2005:3). This observation focuses on the crucial role of the states in the integration process. They are characterised as egocentric entities concentrated on their own profit. In this manner, one cannot deny that 'federalism will only succeed if the benefits to the component states will exceed the costs' (McKay, 1999:4). It must be thus observed that, in this respect, the formation of the USE seems not only unrealistic but also somewhat unwelcome, since it is highly unlikely that states would wish to further share their sovereignty and national interests.

Another argument touches upon the fundamental technical obstacles to the federal Europe such as widespread

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diversity, lack of common identity and decreasing public support for the European institutions. Undeniably, one can remark that the pluralistic and industrialized nature of the modern Europe can hardly be justified by the pursuit of a common good reflecting the interests of the member states equally (Haas in Rosamond, 2000:54). Hoffman indicates that in fact 'any international system will be more likely to produce diversity rather than synthesis among the units' (Hoffman in Rosamond 2000:76). Europe is clearly a region of enormous diversity where 'nationalism and national identities are alive, and every country claims to have a distinctive personality out of the combination of different histories, cultures, norms and values' (McCormick, 2008:37). It therefore seems that states will most probably tend to disagree on a variety of issues, defending their own traditions and identities. A good illustration to the point can be the disagreement over the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the evident variation in attitudes between the 'Italian enthusiasm for the Euro, German ambivalence about it and the widespread British opposition' (Risse, 2003:496). Such diversity, it should be commented, produces significant concerns about the threats to national identity, which consequently generates widespread resistance to European integration. Moreover, the substantial linguistic division between European states also hinders the development of the federal Europe. Forty European languages, important symbols of each country's national identity, seem to be firmly defended by each state (McCormick 2008:32).

Additionally, it appears that the severe criticism of federalism constitutes another strong case against the development of the USE. Writers such as E.H. Carr or S. Hoffman have warned against the 'utopian belief that there is a fundamental harmony of interests among nations that can be embodied in a world state' (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006:21). Other scholars have similarly proclaimed that the establishment of the federal Europe would be rather dangerous undertaking creating unsafe distance between the governors and the governed (2006:26). Miller, for example, observes that the advantage of states is that 'they have a powerful claim on the loyalties of the people and constitute political communities in ways that powerful federated entities cannot' (in Rosamond, 2000:30). David Mitrany appeared to be also against the European integration. He described regionalisation as 'a recipe for reproducing the faults of the state system in the large European scale' (in Rosamond, 2000:37). He further went on to suggest that the centralised system of the USE 'will be closed, exclusive and competitive, and will hardly be suited to mediate between the new ideological divisions or temper the raw nationalism of the new states to steer them towards the new pastures of mutual international community' (in Rosamond 2000:38). Another drawback of a federal composition is that European states might tend to keep some decisions up to the domination of the most powerful states what would in fact lead to the exclusion of the more disadvantaged countries (2000:41).

Last but not least, it is sometimes assumed that to draw the image of the USE and base it on the example of the USA or Switzerland can be rather improbable and unattainable. Winer argues that those countries have emerged as a result of 'conscious political actions that first created a written constitution as the foundation of the new state'. This is in contrast to the EU, which has never had such historical background (2004:27). While McCormick underlines that before establishing the USE the present system would have to fulfil a numerous important preconditions including directly elected government, written constitution, common system of taxation, central budget, common military and foreign policy, greater accountability and transparency in decision-making process (2008:16). It seems rather impractical to think of the EU as being effective enough in accommodating all those federal conditions. The recent failure of the member states to reach final long-term agreement over the EU budget for 2011 provides a good illustration to the point. The decisive rejection of the proposed European Constitution by France and Netherlands in 2005 is yet another pertinent evidence. The anti-federal tendency, or rather federal-reluctancy, has been aptly commented by Bomberg who indicated that very few Europeans want to be assimilated into the model of American melting pot, instead they want to remain a separate and diverse peoples (2003:168). Indeed, recent polls show that only about a half of all Europeans support the idea of integration and there has been recent decline in a number of people who think that their country has benefited from membership (McCormick, 2008:20). This is not a revelation. The averse standpoint appears to a certain extent reasonable considering that many citizens are still less well off now than in the past. The side effect of the integration, it must be indicated, is that not everyone has been able to share its fruits (Fligstein, 2008:245). In this view, the future of Europe and the vision of the federal system seems at best uncertain, if not totally remote.

Concluding, one can certainly agree with Bomberg that 'debating about the future of the EU has become a very popular sport among politicians today' (Bomberg, 2003:224). The paper attempted to bring a meaningful contribution to this debate. It has been demonstrated that the vision of the USE is still intensely advocated by the federalists and

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other pro-European thinkers who strongly believe that it is a step forward in creating more transparent, accountable and democratic EU. They insist that European citizens should aspire to unite in diversity and work collectively towards peace and democracy. It has been confirmed that federation is a very effective way of managing diversity and confronting modern socio-economical challenges. The adoption of single currency and the benefits that it produced for the national markets has been pinpointed as one of the examples of how advantageous European integration can be. On the other hand, however, the approach was objectively confronted with eurosceptic arguments asserting that the idea of the USE is 'long dead and buried' (Welsh, 1996:178). It was analysed that states, as the most influential and powerful actors in the international arena, will never surrender their sovereignty should it threaten their national interests. It has been evidenced that 'many of the hallmarks of the federal state, such as central budget or giving the power of constitutional amendment to the legislatures of the constituent states, are unimaginable' (2003:224). In the same manner, it was indicated that the ideal of the USE is highly unlikely due to the enormous diversity on the European continent. Federation, it was commented, might above all breed dangers and uncertainties to smaller and more vulnerable states.

Thus, in the light of the above, it can be stated that the vision of the USE is both convincing and dangerous at the same time. Lichfield has recognised this predicament indicating that although the USE is an impossible and maybe destructive dream, the core supranational bodies of the EU are just as necessary as ever (in *The Independent*, 12/10/10). With such contrasting attitudes, it is indeed challenging to predict with certainty the future of the European organisation. Welsh believes that it should be above all about 'balancing and rebalancing our need to live together with the respect for national traditions' (1996:178). One may thus argue that, at best, it will remain an experimental system, always in flux and with a number of reforms to be undertaken (Bomberg, 2003:227). Indisputably, it will continue to be an exercise in seeking consensus and trying to achieve overriding unity. Yet, whether it should proceed through the development of the USE will remain a matter for further observation and discussion, for 'how it really works will never match one vision of how it should work' (2003:227).

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