

Future of Europe

For a New Europeanism

FEDERICO OTTAVIO REHO

Just as it did seventy years ago, European integration today has four strategic objectives: peace, security, prosperity and identity. However, 'mainstream Europeanism'—the current European consensus—seems increasingly incapable of providing the right vision for a successful continuation of the European project. To meet the present challenges of European integration and secure unity across the continent, we should develop a new Europeanism that promotes stronger integration in defence, foreign policy and border control, while putting greater emphasis on decentralisation, national autonomy, economic reforms and cultural traditions. This would put into practice the EU's motto 'Unity in diversity' and give precise content to the ideal of an EU that is 'big on big things and small on small things'.

Why European Unity?

The goals of European integration have been emphasised differently at different times, based on the historical circumstances and people's political preferences. Still, the four goals themselves remain what they were 70 years ago:

1. peace, the political goal;
2. security, the geopolitical goal;
3. prosperity, the economic goal; and
4. identity, the cultural goal.

These goals continue to provide the essential arguments for the political integration of our continent. Insofar as these goals are not achievable within a framework of cooperation among fully sovereign countries, they also provide the basic justification for the supranational mode of integration favoured by Europe's founding fathers

The three 'classical Europeanisms'

The visionaries who first conceived and pursued the political project of unifying Europe—the founding fathers—loyally collaborated in the name of a shared aspiration to European unity. They all had a 'federalist' outlook. That is, their common ambition was to build, not an organisation of cooperating sovereign states, but a federation of states with strong supranational institutions. However, they belonged to different political and intellectual traditions and therefore did not share a single view of European unity. It is possible to reconstruct at least three distinct visions of European unity at the origins of European integration:

1. *The vision of the Christian Democrats (primarily Adenauer, De Gasperi and Schuman)*. Their vision was imbued with references to the cultural and Christian traditions of European civilisation. They distrusted a purely technocratic approach and had a deep appreciation for the identity and traditions of Europe's nations and regions. Their ideal seems best realised by a minimalist federation or confederation that would ensure peace, deal with a few strategic issues and fully respect national and regional

autonomy, in strict accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

2. The vision of the technocrats (mainly Jean Monnet and his followers within the EU institutions). Rather than rely on the political process, they preferred to build European unity by transferring powers to enlightened European technocrats who would ‘depoliticise’ them. The neo-functionalist strategy—which tries to justify every advancement of European integration as a technocratic necessity and not as a political choice—derives from this vision. It certainly bears part of the blame for the present unpopularity of European integration.

3. The vision of the progressives (mainly Altiero Spinelli and his followers in socialist and liberal circles). Their vision was rooted in the nation-building of nineteenth-century European states. When they talked about a European federation, they clearly meant the creation of a European state and, in due course, of a European democratic nation. They also emphasised social equality and economic intervention, which predisposed them towards centralisation and regulatory harmonisation. They had no attachment to Europe’s national traditions and cultures, and they were openly hostile to its Christian heritage.

Notwithstanding their close cooperation in promoting the first steps of European integration, these three groups represent distinct ideological traditions. In the progressive context of the 1970s and during Jacques Delors’s presidency of the European Commission (1985–95), differences between these strands of thought became blurred and a more or less uniform ‘mainstream Europeanism’ emerged.

Mainstream Europeanism and its limits

Mainstream Europeanism is the result of political developments since the 1970s, but it is also a consequence of the specific mode of integration followed after the failure of the European Defence Community (1954). Since a one-shot transition to a federal European order had proven impossible, the solution found was the sharing of sovereignty within common European institutions in more and more policy fields, starting with the fields necessary to create a common European market. It was expected that integration in these fields would generate common problems whose solution would require integration in other fields, thus fuelling a self-supporting integration dynamic ('neo-functionalism').

The great historical merit of mainstream Europeanism is that it made European integration possible in the very challenging conditions of the post–Second World War period. However, it has significant flaws and it seems increasingly incapable of providing the right vision and narrative for a successful continuation of the European project:

1. It is an ambiguous doctrine that has never clearly spelled out what the final competences and constitutional structure of the EU should be. On the contrary, its supporters have often conveyed the impression that any occasion was good for transferring more and more powers to the European level as an a priori commitment to the cause of 'more Europe'. Hence the widespread impression that, in the EU, sovereignty can potentially be 'shared' in virtually all areas of public policy, in contrast to traditional federations, where the federal level has competence in a limited number of clearly enumerated fields.
2. It does not allow a left–right political divide to emerge. As a consequence, the debate tends to be between an undifferentiated pro-European mainstream, on the one hand, and anti-European parties, on the other. This plays right into the hands of populists, who can easily accuse the centre–right and the centre–left of being basically alike. It is therefore important to develop a centre–right Europeanism that represents a clear alternative to the Europeanism of the left.
3. It has often displayed a preference for centralisation, harmonisation and regulation that is disliked by many citizens and is not in line with a well-conceived federalism.

An authentic federalism would require the centralisation of very few functions (e.g. foreign policy, defence and the functions necessary to enforce the four freedoms of the internal market) and the complete decentralisation of all the rest. But mainstream Europeanism requires the ‘sharing’ of sovereignty in an ever-growing number of policy fields.

4. It is increasingly seen as technocratic and at times as inimical to national democracy. Furthermore, its rhetoric often sounds disconnected from the culture and traditions of European civilisation, and its dominant cultural trait seems to be a vague celebration of diversity with leftist overtones. No emphasis is put on the cultural foundations of European unity.

As a result of these shortcomings, traditional Europeanism is now seen as old-fashioned and unpalatable in many EU countries. It is losing ground to Europhobes as well as to the ‘Eurorealism’ of Eurosceptics. The former want to dismantle the EU altogether, while the latter would prefer to scrap the political aspects of European integration, thus reducing the EU to a loosely structured organisation of sovereign states cooperating on matters of common interest. To preserve the achievements of European integration, both tendencies must be countered by developing a new and more robust Europeanism.

Proposals for a new Europeanism

The main feature of the three classical Europeanisms and of mainstream Europeanism is their belief in a political project that goes beyond fragile cooperation among sovereign states. This remains valid. However, it must be refocused and rearticulated to meet the challenges of contemporary Europe. Here are six proposals in this direction:

1. European integration should be progressively refocused so as to concentrate on the core areas of traditional federal competence.

At the moment the lion’s share of the EU budget (over 70%) is directed to agricultural subsidies and cohesion funds. Beyond this, the core business of EU institutions is regulating the internal market and, following the crisis, providing budgetary oversight of national governments. This allocation of tasks is partly dysfunctional. The supra-

national institutions should take on more responsibility for defence, foreign policy and border control, and eventually acquire some limited treasury functions. The EU level should also continue to safeguard the unity of the internal market by strictly enforcing the free circulation of goods, services, capital and people, as well as the prohibition of state aid. But the present level of harmonisation of regulatory standards is not always justified. Whenever possible, mutual recognition of standards and professional qualifications within the EU should be preferred.

2. Outside the core strategic areas where integration is needed, the EU should encourage decentralisation and competition, not centralisation and harmonisation.

Here we must frankly admit that mainstream Europeanism has gone astray. In the European debate, even the term ‘federalism’ has come to be commonly associated with centralisation at the EU level, while in true federations, such as Canada and Switzerland, federalism is an institutional system aimed at protecting the autonomy of the federated states. In all fields where centralisation is not strictly necessary to avoid worse evils, we should openly reject it and defend instead the autonomous powers of states and regions, in accordance with the strictest interpretation of subsidiarity. Although subsidiarity is rightly presented as ‘a two-way street’, there is no doubt that it implies a clear preference for the lower level and a consensual construction of unity from the bottom up.

3. The political economy of eurozone countries is ill-suited to a decentralised monetary union and in need of deep reforms.

The legacy of the twentieth-century welfare state is unprecedented levels of debt and the state-centred provision of social security, healthcare and education. During the financial crisis, this legacy proved to be incompatible with the new constraints on monetary and fiscal policy imposed by the single currency. A transition towards a more sustainable Union requires a drastic reduction of public debt and more market-oriented paradigms for the provision of public services in countries that have adopted the euro. This means, not less commitment to social inclusion, but a more intelligent one, with more streamlined policies that economise resources and focus on the those truly in need, in line with the principles of the social market economy. The primary loci of policies for social inclusion should remain member states, regions and local communities.

4. We should be wary of plans for the coordination and centralisation of budgetary and economic policies put forward to build a genuine economic and monetary union.

They envisage a degree of bureaucratic control over national economic policies that is unknown in any federal order and risks further undermining the legitimacy of the EU. Instead of evolving towards a bureaucratically centralised confederation, the eurozone should become a union whose member states would be characterised by low levels of public debt, the competitive provision of public services and economic openness. In this way the member states would be able to retain the core of their budgetary powers.

5. We should be open to considering limited forms of differentiated integration.

This will be necessary to accommodate growing divergences among member states regarding the degree and forms of European integration, albeit within a single institutional framework. To preserve the integrity of the single market as the common backbone of the whole Union, the economic centralisation of the eurozone should be minimised to what is strictly necessary to ensure its viability.

6. We should keep the debate on Europe's identity alive while rigorously defending subsidiarity in connection with cultural issues.

Our founding fathers put a strong emphasis on the classical, Christian and humanist heritage of Europe, as well as on its rich variety of national identities and traditions. We should continue in their footsteps. Identity politics should be reclaimed from the far-right and reconciled with support for an integrated European order. This can be done by rediscovering the cultural, spiritual and political foundations that made Europe 'United in diversity' for almost a millennium before the European project appropriated the motto to itself. Common institutions should not be expected to invent and promote an artificial European identity; rather, they should eliminate causes of friction and violent conflicts while respecting national and regional differences. On such sensitive issues as family structures, gay marriage and the role of religious symbols in public life, we should strongly defend the prerogatives of member states against EU encroachment. Attempts by progressives to use the EU institutions to force liberal values on more conservative member states should be explicitly condemned as detrimental to the cause of a united Europe. Such attempts are partly to blame for the unpopularity of the EU in some countries.

Potential benefits of a new Europeanism

1. Better articulation of the debate on the future of the EU.

Vague formulas such as ‘an ever closer union’ and ‘more Europe’ would be given a more precise constitutional meaning—one that would make it easier to fend off the attacks of Eurosceptics against alleged attempts to create a European superstate.

2. Emergence of a distinctive centre–right Europeanism.

This Europeanism would be truer to the principle of ‘Unity in diversity’. It would reject centralisation and support subsidiarity, competition and open economies. Its distinctiveness from the interventionist and centralising tendencies of the left would become clear.

3. Shaping a narrative that reclaims identity politics from the far-right.

Identity politics would be purged of its nationalist features, while national and regional identities would become an integral part of Europeanism.

4. New rationale for much needed economic and social reforms at the national level.

Such reforms would now be presented for what they actually are: part of a transition to a more sustainable and open economic order in Europe, which is incompatible with the high level of public debt and government intervention inherited from twentieth-century nation states. This should provide an occasion to make our social-security systems more modern and effective.

5. New rationale for fast-tracking plans to enhance EU defence and foreign policy.

To make a real difference, these plans should go beyond simple intergovernmental cooperation. A possible option would be to resurrect the old European Defence Community Treaty, which was voted down in 1954, and to adapt it to present circumstances. The savings and efficiency gains could be significant for participating countries. They would also benefit transatlantic relations by favouring a more balanced sharing of defence costs between Europe and the US within NATO. This will be badly needed under the new American administration.

Conclusion

European unity is too precious for us to undermine it by clinging onto rigid and old-fashion conceptions of its forms and goals. In the present circumstances, an openness to experiment with new solutions is necessary for successfully saving it. The Commission's decision to launch, with its White Paper on the Future of Europe, a continental discussion on our way ahead is an important step in the right direction. The Commission's readiness to also consider scenarios very different from the status quo and the traditional integration rhetoric is welcome. As this paper has explained, Europeanism consists in a set of lasting principles and goals that retain their relevance in our time. However, many of the concrete institutional forms and political assumptions of mainstream Europeanism have outlived their usefulness. Our challenge is to develop new and viable ones, as this paper tries to do.

About the author

Federico Ottavio Reho is a Research Officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, where he is responsible for all research on political parties and EU institutions. He previously worked in the EU Institutions and Fora Division of the European Central Bank. He has studied European political economy in four European countries, including at the London School of Economics and the Hertie School of Governance (Berlin).

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Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies
Rue du Commerce 20 Brussels, BE 1000

For more information please visit:
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