The European Union: Towards a United States of Europe

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The European Union (EU), a contested “European” political construct, is contemporarily positioned at a critical juncture that presents three options that may determine its status as a supranational actor: stagnation, dissolution, or deeper and wider integration. The myriad pressures antagonizing the European Union and its structural foundations parallel those that the project sought to address following World War II. The unprecedented level of devastation caused by advanced military technologies and totalitarian ideologies in the war provided the impetus for increased cooperation amongst independent nation-states. Institutional cooperation encourages the deconstruction of destructive socio-political forces including racism, nationalism, and primordial cultural identities. These essentialist forces emerge in the absence of effective governance and encourage internal and external hostilities. The EU is intended to provide a structural framework for liberal-democratic countries to make collective decisions to increase economic prosperity, freedom, security, and justice. Although the EU’s framework has the potential to achieve gains for all members, recent events such as the ongoing Sovereign Debt Crisis appear to provide Euro-skeptics with convincing empirical data that bolsters their calls for the dissolution or halting of further integration. Assuming that deeper and wider integration is the most likely scenario, this paper will examine the merits of the liberal intergovernmentalist and federalist perspectives in predicting the future course of EU integration.

The EU is an 'emergent' project forged out of conflict and was a solution to overcome nationalistic hostilities and to expedite the post-war reconstruction of Europe. The regional project initially drew logical parallels to that of the failed League of Nations for its diplomatic inclinations; however, it differed in its proposed

solution to the recurring 'German Question.' While the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles, and the resentful French state sought to economically repress Germany in the post-WWI period through crippling reparations and demilitarization, the predecessor to the European Union, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), subscribed to a broader plan of peaceful West German re-integration through Western institutional involvement. Since the repression of post-war Germany proved ineffective, cooperation within the unfolding Cold War context was the most feasible course of action as it was supportive of Western cultivation and communist containment; however, there was significant hesitation on behalf of the French in accepting a solution that would include their historic enemy of the preceding two centuries. This hesitation would become a portent of future tension.¹

Although the French state had legitimate grievances with Germany, it was French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, along with Konrad Adenauer of West Germany, who advanced the Schuman Plan which would initiate the multi-sovereign amalgamation of coal and steel resources in 1951.² The Schuman Plan was the proposed institutional design of the ECSC which was drafted by Jean Monnet and agreed upon in the Treaty of Paris by Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, France, Germany, and Nederland.³ Monnet’s theoretical insights, gained from his experience with French national economic planning in the period following the war, “confirmed his long-held view that economic development and prosperity

¹ Derek W. Urwin, “The European Community: From 1945 to 1985,” in *European Union Politics* 4th ed, ed. Cini,

Michelle, and Nieves Perez-Solorzano Borrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17.

² Ibid., 16.

³ Ibid.

could be best achieved at a European, rather than a national, level, and ... the route to political integration was a long road that inevitably lay through economics.”⁴ Monnet, when drafting the Schuman Plan, believed that the path to European stability would be one of gradual integration. The Treaty’s teleological discourse positioned the ECSC as the opening move of a continuous process of deepening and widening European solidarity.

While the theoretical debate regarding the reasons for the project’s naissance is dominated by intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism, the debate over the EU’s future course is best explained through liberal intergovernmentalism and federalism. Federalism is a multi-level political structure bound together by a central constitution that qualifies the levels of sovereignty between superior and subordinate actors.⁵ Federations consist of national and provincial governments elected in accordance with democratic practices.

Federalism has existed since the days of the Roman Empire and has been adopted by various states several times in the years since. One particularly well known European enlightenment thinker, Immanuel Kant, described a form of federalism in his *Perpetual Peace*. Kant wrote extensively about ethics, reason, and political philosophy during a tumultuous period of European uncertainty and inquiry. Kant describes a Federation of Free States as the highest form of political rationality in which each individual nation has its own legal order in addition to an international constitution.⁶ He states that each “nation ... for the sake of its own security can and ought to demand to others that they should enter along with it into a constitution.”⁷ An international constitution, however, could only occur in Europe after legal and political institutions spread through colonialism and expansion.

Kant theorizes that sovereign entities are in the state of nature entitling them to absolute

power through their original right. He asserts that “peoples who have grouped themselves into nation-states may be judged in the same way as individual men living in a state of nature ... they are a standing offence to one another by the very fact that they are neighbors.”⁸ His paradigmatic statement is reflective of the political instability during his period. He firmly believed that through constitutional solidarity, warfare could be avoided, as opposed to the inevitability of violence in the anarchic system for individual entities. This form of solidarity requires mutual recognition through the acquiescence of original right, signalling a departure from the state of nature. Kant’s support for a system of political and legal homogeneity is rooted in the notion that “in the state of nature, the right to make war is permitted ... thus if a state believes that it has been injured by another state, it is entitled to resort to violence, for it cannot in the state of nature gain satisfaction through legal proceedings, the only means of settling disputes in a state governed by right.”⁹ Although the EU’s contemporary structure vastly differs from the federal system that Kant describes, the absence of war between member states supports his assertions.

Altiero Spinelli, who is regarded as one of the “founding fathers of the European Union,” spent several years in prison for his membership in the Italian communist party prior to gaining notoriety for his federalist partisanship.¹⁰ Spinelli attempted to resist Mussolini’s fascism through leftist activity prior to the outbreak of WWII; however, during his incarceration, his belief in the ideology began to falter and he became increasingly alienated from the communist movement and embraced federalism after reading the works of Einaud, Beveridge, and Robbins.¹¹ Spinelli was motivated by Robbins’ work, which “concluded that nation-states would need a common government to deal with their mutual

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Eugene W. Hickok, “Understanding Federalism,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 19, no. 4 (1990): 216.

⁶ H.S. Reiss, eds., *Kant: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 102.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁰ John Pinder, “Altiero Spinelli’s European Federal Odyssey,” *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 42, no.4 (2007): 573.

¹¹ Ibid., 572.

interdependence in the fields of both the economy and security; and among democratic states it was federal government that would be required.”¹²

In 1941, Spinelli co-authored the Venetian Manifesto with Ernesto Rossi, which proposed a federation of European states to prevent war, provided a framework for economic prosperity, and began a new chapter of European history.¹³ The Manifesto became a founding document of the Movimento Federalista Europeo in 1943; in addition, he delivered an important speech at the first Congress of the European Union of Federalists stating that martial aid provided by the United States of America should play an instrumental role in creating a federal union.¹⁴ He warned that failure to organize into such a political structure would result in the “Americans ... be[coming] more and more tempted to move from the liberal alternative to that of imperialism.”¹⁵ His political leadership was well received within the Italian *polis*, and he was able to use that to acquire half a million signatures for a petition urging the development of a European federal state.¹⁶ Spinelli, in concert with the other European federalists, played a pivotal role in the post-war period by raising support for their vision of a new political direction and identity.

Europeanization, the process by which civilians in sovereign nation-states increasingly adopt a supranational identity over that of their own nation-states, has helped the region flourish politically and economically. Although the EU has experienced recent economic downturn and seen the implementation of severe austerity measures in several member states, its efficacy has been empirically validated by its ability to overcome post-WWII obstacles, increase European autonomy and influence within the global system, and its resiliency for its part in economic assistance keeping Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain afloat. The current crisis is part of a series that presents an opportunity to deepen and widen

integration of member states, guided by the principles of federalism. As Jean Monnet reflected, “Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.”¹⁷ The teleology of sectoral integration and spillover into other areas exemplifies the “interconnected nature of modern economies and snowballing institutional delegations of power [that] would gradually propel Europe towards a true political union.”¹⁸

Following the trajectory of integration beginning post-WWII, today’s EU economically rivals established superpowers such as the United States and emerging powers such as China. Through treaty agreements, the EU now consists of 28 member states representing 500 million citizens and exceeds the population and GDP of the United States of America, which currently has 316 million citizens. The EU is the sum, which through the process of enlargement as well as deeper and wider integration, has greater political and economic leverage in the global system than its parts. Without membership in the EU, nations that are comparatively small geographically and in terms of population such as Cyprus (population 0.8 million) and Malta (0.4 million) would suffer economically as they would face immense trade difficulties due to their lesser buying power and limited domestic economies. The combination of the EU’s member states’ domestic comparative advantages allows for greater diversification of risk in the global economic system as opposed to individual states, which suffer relatively more as a result of market fluctuations.

In addition to greater vitality in the face of capitalist market downturns, a political structure that has a clear delineation of power, responsibilities, and duties that function in conjunction with each other has greater agency to resist and condition the outcomes of globalization. This comprehensive federal system ensures the survival of the state through self-help to a greater success than smaller independent nations that are

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 573.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Craig Parsons and Matthias Mattijs, *Future of the Euro* (publication dated 2015), 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

less equipped to respond to the current market logic of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation. The supranational apparatus is instrumental in creating a system that transcends local, municipal, and provincial differences through a stable federal identity. Having interconnected systems of governance that are nearly uniform in structure over a vast geographic area has similar logic to that of Kant's belief that states that are not in a "Federation of Free States" are in the state of nature and when injured are without legal recourse and must resort to war.¹⁹

The EU, a system of linked economic, legal, and political systems increases efficiency in external markets as it is the sum of its parts rather than a single entity, thus ensuring the greatest degree of peace, as understood through the democratic peace theory. Although the democratic peace theory is critiqued for many reasons, including its resting upon an ambiguous definition of democracy, its subjective classification of war, and its tendency towards tautologies, some scholars argue that "liberal ideas cause liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another, and that the same ideas prod these states into war with illiberal states."²⁰ Owen states that "all individuals share an interest in peace, and should want war only as an instrument to bring about peace."²¹ With supranational directives establishing important shared policies, the EU creates new norms based upon best practices; however, the principle of subsidiarity remains.

Switzerland's federation, containing 26 partially autonomous cantons, is illustrative of the benefits that constitutional delineation of powers can reap for the collective. Switzerland "has been one of the world's most successful federal states" and can provide lessons for the future of EU integration.²² The unification of the independent Swiss cantons and establishment of common

political preferences took several centuries as it was "respectful of the autonomy of the cantons, which were never anxious to hand over competencies."²³ The move towards a United States of Europe should be an incremental process, involving high democratic input from member states. In addition, the current project needs to undergo a "coordinated program of European structural reform" and "international competitiveness of the EU states must be strengthened further."²⁴

Some areas in proximity to the EU's external borders are experiencing a re-ignition of hostilities and conflict. The immensely complex ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the jihadis from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria marching closer to EU applicant Turkey, and the grievances and antagonism between the nations that formerly comprised Yugoslavia exemplify the need for solidarity. With a federation, the central government would be better able to respond to military threats through the creation of a European defense force, ending the EU's dependence upon NATO. In the near future, the EU must further harmonize economic and monetary policy in order to be better equipped to deal with economic downturns, just as the recent Million Mask March sought to highlight with regards to the shortcomings of the eurozone.

David Cameron's dissatisfaction with the EU and consideration of a referendum to leave it is symptomatic of the intergovernmentalist approach to the EU's future. According to Cini & Borragan, liberal intergovernmentalism is a grand theory that "deal[s] explicitly with the interface between domestic and international politics" by "emphasizing the importance of both the preferences and the power of states."²⁵ Liberal intergovernmentalism's state-centric approach to proposed policies and treaties may be viewed as a hindrance to the integration project. Liberal intergovernmentalism, which includes elements of

¹⁹ H.S. Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 167.

²⁰ John M. Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," *International Security* 19, no.2 (2007): 88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²² Peter Sutherland et al., "Europe's Next Steps," *New Perspective Quarterly* 29, no.3 (2012): 12.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Michelle Cini and Nieves Perez-Solorzano Borragan, *European Union Politics*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78.

the realist perspective, is concerned with its preferences first; although intergovernmentalism does acknowledge the utility of institutional cooperation, it is skeptical of supranational competency which it views as undermining its sovereign authority. The Council of Ministers, which is represented by the EU members' heads of state, "must give up powers and should be transformed into an upper chamber."²⁶

The EU is situated at a critical junction that may lead to stagnation, dissolution, or a deeper and wider integration. The project has thus far proven that supranationalism mitigates the effects of nationalism and provides a framework for cooperation and stability, which leads to increases in economic productivity. Kant, in concert with other federalists, understood that through material interdependence, the chances of warfare would be reduced. The Sovereign Debt Crisis presents an opportunity for the EU to deepen and widen integration towards a United States of Europe. Switzerland's success with federalism teaches that the move towards a federal structure should be gradual to allow for acculturation and for the process of harmonizing policies. The intergovernmentalist perspective is dominated by state-centrism that threatens the future of the EU. Within the global system, a federal structure with unified systems is better able to handle market fluctuations as well as shape the outcomes of globalization. If the process of integration is halted, the EU may dissolve, signaling a return once again to the state of nature. This regressive move, the realists would argue, would unleash nationalist fervor, which may lead to the re-ignition of war and totalitarianism.

²⁶ Sutherland et al., "Europe's Next Steps," 13.

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