

How Federalism has resulted in a Federation – but a Federation of Nation States

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Is the official purpose of the EU still ‘an ever closer union of the peoples of Europe’ as formulated in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, or are we in reality moving in the direction of a ‘federation of nation states’ as formulated by the president of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso in his State of the Union Address in the European Parliament 12 September 2012? What exactly are the aims of the European Union aims, apart from economic growth and peaceful cooperation? At closer inspection this is much less clear than assumed in dominating EU circles ever since the launch of European integration with the announcement of the European Coal and Steel Community 9 May 1950 by Robert Schuman (1886-1963) with help of Jean Monnet (1888-1979).

The optimistic vision of an ever closer union has been challenged at least since 1992 when a majority of the Danish voters rejected the Maastricht Treaty with its introduction of an Economic and Monetary Union. Nevertheless, the Euro and the ECB in Frankfurt were introduced in 1999 without the envisaged political controls. The weaknesses of this construction were revealed in the financial crisis in 2008 and led to a rapidly rising Euroscepticism on the left as well as the right. The debt crisis in Greece has put the whole European project in jeopardy. Combined with external challenges from Russia’s intervention in Ukraine, civil wars in Syria, Iraq and Libya and the subsequent tidal wave of immigrants and refugees, European solidarity is put under pressure at the same time as the public opinion seems to turn away from the European institutions and European solutions. Furthermore, the UK asks for a fundamental rehearsal of the workings of the EU, in particular restrictions on the free movement of people, while the most eager supporters of European cooperation seem to be the regional nationalists in Catalonia and Scotland who want independence from Spain and UK, respectively, and voters in aspiring countries such as Western Ukraine, Moldova and the Balkans and elsewhere.

All this is the opposite of the intentions of the ideology of federalism which inspired the first generations of the fathers of Europe – Europe’s Saints as they were baptized by the hard-nosed British historian Alan Milward in a seminal book from 1992. How this has come about and how European integration in reality has strengthened the nation states instead of weakening them as envisaged by critics of the EU project as well as its most ardent supporters is discussed in the lecture under the heading ‘Europe as a federation of nation states’ which logically seen is a contradiction in terms.