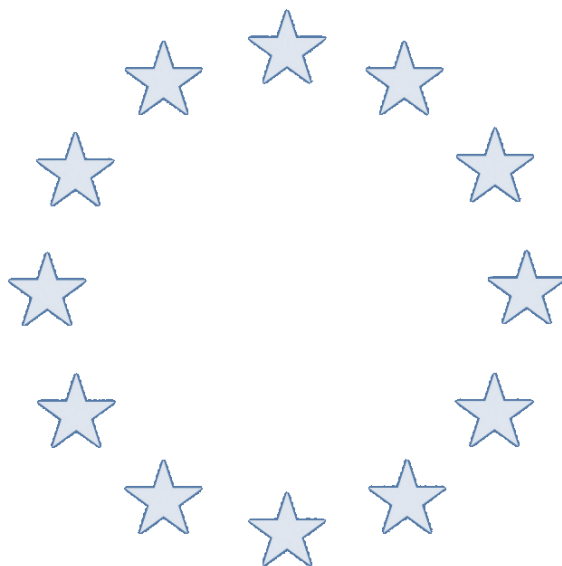


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# Should we view Europe becoming a federation as an ideal towards which we want to grow?

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April 2013



## **Introduction**

Already from the start of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950, many saw a future of further European integration. An ambitious idea of integration is Europe becoming a federation, sometimes also called The United States of Europe<sup>[1]</sup>, named after the (often seen as successful) example of the United States of America. There are many who support this view of a federal Europe. However the economic crisis, negative press and the reluctance of national governments to let go of power, have seriously damaged the positive view of a federal Europe. For these and many other reasons, some prefer a nation state approach to further European integration. The main question to solve will be: Should we view Europe becoming a federation as an ideal towards which we want to grow?

## **The federation**

The first thing that needs to be discussed is: what exactly is a federation? The dictionary gives the following definitions “1. The formation of a political unity, with a central government, by a number of separate states, each of which retains control of its own internal affairs. 2. A federated body formed by a number of nations, states, societies, unions, etc., each retaining control of its own internal affairs.”<sup>[2]</sup>. This definition is clear, but then isn't the European Union a federation already? All member states of the European Union are very independent and the European Parliament, European Council and the European Commission can be seen as its government. First, this paper will further look into the European integration and the European institutions and bodies. Next, the differences between the contemporary European Union and a federal Europe will be investigated. Finally, the opinions of the proponents and opponents of a federal Europe will be described.

## **European integration**

As of 1950, the European Coal and Steel Community started to unite European countries economically and politically in order to secure lasting peace. Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands were the first members of this early European cooperation. The idea came into existence that countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent and so are more likely to avoid conflict. In 1957, the European Economic Community (EEC) was created after this idea to increase economic cooperation<sup>[3]</sup>. What began as a purely economic union has evolved into an organisation spanning many policy areas. The name change from the EEC to the European Union (EU) in 1993 reflected this.

The EU is founded on the rule of law: everything that it does is based on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by all member countries<sup>[4]</sup>. The treaties are negotiated and agreed upon by all the EU Member States and then accepted by their parliaments or by referendum. A treaty is a binding agreement between the member countries and it sets out EU objectives, rules for EU institutions, how decisions are made and the relationship between the EU and its member countries<sup>[5]</sup>. Decisions within the European Union are made by the various European institutions. The European Parliament represents the citizens of the member states and is directly elected by them. The European Council consists of the national and EU-level leaders. The European Commission represents the interests of the European Union as a whole and its members are appointed by national governments. In short, the European

Commission proposes new laws, and the Parliament and Council adopt or reject them. The Commission and the member countries then implement them <sup>[6]</sup>.

### **Why Europe is not (yet) a federation**

Now that we know how the European Union is structured, we can assess in which aspects it coincides with and differs from a federation.

The European Union shares most features of what the literature defines as a federation. First of all, the EU has at least two levels of government, namely EU-level and member-state-level, each existing under its own right. The European Treaties allocate jurisdiction and resources to these two main orders of government. In areas where the jurisdiction of the EU and the Member States overlap, there are provisions for shared government. Secondly, community law is superior to national law. The European Court of Justice solves conflicts between the European institutions and the Member States. In addition, European legislation is increasingly made by majority decision. At the same time, the composition and procedures of the European institutions are based not only on principles of majoritarian representation, but guarantee the representation of minority views. Finally, the EU has a directly elected parliament. Once every five years the European Parliament is directly chosen by the European voters <sup>[7]</sup>.

However, there are important features of a federation which the European Union lacks. First of all the European Union is not a federal state because its member states are independent sovereign nations. However, the member states have given up some of their sovereignty in order to gain greater collective strength and influence than they could have when acting individually. In practice, this means that the member states give up some of their decision-making powers to the European institutions. You could argue that the European Union fits the middle between the fully federal system (such as the United States) and the intergovernmental cooperation system (such as the United Nations). In addition, the European Parliament has no supervision over the Council. Furthermore it may dismiss the Commission only as a body, which is a measure far too drastic to use daily. In addition, the Parliament has no right to initiate legislation <sup>[8]</sup>.

When we look at the differences between the European Union and the United States of America, an example of federalism, we see other reasons why the EU is not (yet) a federation. The EU is governed by treaties between the member states, whereas the United States is founded on a constitution. The European Union is built on agreeing concrete policies, particularly economically for a single market. Member states of the EU have retained national control of foreign and defence policy, whereas the United States has a joint military force. Also taxation is a missing portfolio. The EU does not tax its citizens directly, but rather gets its main income from the contribution of its member state. In addition, nations have individual membership of intergovernmental bodies, such as the United Nations. If the EU were a true federation with a coherent central government, Henry Kissinger would not need to have asked, ‘When I want to speak to Europe, who do I telephone?’ <sup>[9]</sup>.

For all these reasons, the European Union is at present no federal state. There is a lot of debate about the prospects in what direction the European Union will develop itself. Will the European Union continue to exist and integrate even more into the direction of a “United States of Europe” or will the economic crisis and the populist national parties, among other

things, contribute to the independence of the member states and the fall of the European Union? There exist different opinions about the desirability of these two different directions.

### **The proponents of a federal Europe**

Already in 1946 Winston Churchill advocated for a 'United States of Europe' in his famous speech at the University of Zurich in 1946. He was convinced that only a united Europe could overcome the two World Wars and guarantee peace. His goal was to remove the downside of European nationalism. Churchill was one of the first to plea for European integration to prevent a world war from ever happening again. As a first step, he called for the creation of a Council of Europe, which was founded on 5 May 1949. Winston Churchill became a driving force behind European integration and an active fighter for its cause <sup>[10]</sup>.

Last year, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso argued in favour of the European Union to further integrate and become a federation. He said that the member states need to federate if the EU wants to survive the coming decades. He called for the EU to be turned into a "federation of nation states" <sup>[11]</sup>. Barroso sees it necessary for the EU to further integrate and act as one in an age of globalization. Economically the EU will be better able to compete with large trading partners such as the United States and China.

European Parliament President Martin Schulz agrees with Barroso. Schulz is of the opinion that no EU member state is able to take on challenges such as climate change, immigration and economic crisis on its own. Therefore, the European integration must continue to search for solutions together. "Someday we will have the 'United States of Europe'," Schulz said. However, there has to remain diversity of European identities and it should not lead to disappearance of national identities.

In June 2012, ten EU foreign ministers participated in a study group for the future of Europe. Their aim was to exert pressure to the process of the European Union to become a federation. They proposed to reduce the power of national government leaders and give greater authority to the European Commission, especially the European Commission president. In addition, they recommended to replace European councils of ministers and heads of state with a chamber "of states" in the European parliament. National topics, most importantly the management of borders, defence and public spending, will be transferred to the federation <sup>[12]</sup>.

Another proponent of further European integration is the European Federalist Party. This European political party strives for a more democratic, efficient and cohesive Europe. They believe that only a European approach, as opposed to a national approach, can provide solutions to increasingly global challenges. In their manifest they describe that their goal is to unite European movements and citizens to strive for a new European social contract within a true, transparent and fair European Federation. The party aims to do this by, for example, establishing English as the main language of the European Federation and a President elected directly by the European citizens. Just as President Schulz, the party treats the different national cultures with caution: "European culture consists of a rich multitude of local expressions that must be preserved and promoted as a unique treasure and as the common ground of our identity" <sup>[13]</sup>.

In the Standard Eurobarometer survey, carried out in 2012, the public opinion in the EU (27 member states and the six candidate countries) is measured. It becomes apparent that

the public opinion of European citizens is mainly positive about further European integration. Almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) say they are in favour of a common security and defence policy among EU member States. Also, 64% support a common foreign policy of the 27 member states of the EU. Traditionally, opinions in the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom are the most hostile to a common foreign policy. Most importantly, more than 40% of European citizens are in favour of developing the European Union into a federation of nation-states, while 35% are opposed to the idea. The other 20% expresses no opinion, which is relatively high on this question. This high rate of no opinion suggests that this debate is still poorly understood by a large proportion of the population in some countries <sup>[14]</sup>.

### **The opponents of a federal Europe**

However, not everyone agrees with these positive views of a federal Europe. An indication of opposition regarding the further integration of Europe is the failing of a European constitution. Around 2005, an effort to draw up a constitution for the EU was ultimately defeated after voters in several traditionally pro-European states, especially France and the Netherlands, rejected it in referendums. Because France and the Netherlands were founder members of the European Economic Community and France in particular is one of the key players, the no-vote signals a disconnection between the voters of Europe and the EU institutions <sup>[15]</sup>.

Another drawback of a federation is the change of treaties it requires. Changing the EU treaty has happened in the past, but it is a complex and lengthy process that often raises tensions among member states. For example, the formulation of the Lisbon Treaty begun in 2002, but only came into force on December 1, 2009.

The call from Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron for an in-out EU referendum signals the opposite of further European integration. Bernard Jenkin, the veteran Eurosceptic, said: "The speech sets out some very important principles about the importance of national parliaments, the importance of legitimacy and the repudiation of ever closer union is very significant" <sup>[16]</sup>. Cameron's speech did not plea for a European federation, but rather for more national autonomy. Britain is not the only country where anti-EU passions are stirring. The increasing role Euroscepticism plays in West European political parties represents dissatisfaction with the EU <sup>[17]</sup>. Euroscepticism is found across political parties across the left and right spectrum and they focus attention on the perceived disadvantages of Union membership. Frequently used arguments by Eurosceptics are the weakening of the nation state because of European integration, the view that the European Union is undemocratic and the opinion that joining all together in one union will not lead to economic growth and stability for every member state.

The British reservations against a federal Europe have a long history. The political argument holds that keeping the continental powers divided traditionally enabled Britain to develop a unique political system and to extend it to a global empire. The historical argument is that the continentals' motivation for forming the EU varied substantially from the way Britain perceived herself. The motivation to forget the Second World War and its consequences was to forget the British role as the saviour of Europe. Finally, the economic argument holds that Britain's membership jeopardized its established and important trade links with the Commonwealth of Nations <sup>[18]</sup>.

In his paper, Dennis C. Mueller mentions a problem of a federal state that can arise and must be taken into consideration. Many nations think that some public goods should be available for every citizen. The inequality between different member states may lead to transferring funds from members of rich nations to the poorer nations in order to increase the capacity of the poorer ones to finance these minimum levels of public services <sup>[18]</sup>. Linked to this idea is the view that differences between the member states can lead to problems in implementing policies. Because of the current economic crisis it becomes apparent that it is difficult to implement one economic policy for every member state, because not all member states are the same. Actually, every nation wants and needs a different policy, but because of the single currency and central bank this is not possible anymore. Therefore, the European central bank has the difficult task of implementing a policy that fits the middle of all the different needs.

### **Conclusion**

One of the main ideas of the proponents of a federal Europe is that in an age of globalization, the EU needs to be a federation in order to be able to compete with large trading partners. In addition, no EU member state can take on large global problems on its own. The main feeling is that further integration and more cooperation, would strengthen Europe. More promising is that European citizens are positive about further European integration. In contrast, the rejection of a European constitution, the British reservations against a federal Europe and the increasingly important role of Euroscepticism are indications that further European integration is not happening in the near future. Another difficulty is the large difference between member states, which makes implementing a single policy for all nations a problematic task.

To come back to the main question: Should we view Europe becoming a federation as an ideal towards which we want to grow? If we have to believe the proponents, we can answer positive to this question. However, as we have already seen, there are also drawbacks and difficulties. In my opinion, a federal Europe is definitely an ideal. I think that working together will benefit each member state, because of the simple fact that by cooperation we will be able to achieve more. For instance, environmental problems can be dealt with more effectively, economically the EU can make an end to the economic crisis and continue growing and the EU will have a stronger voice in worldwide discussions. When the EU develops itself into a federation, decision and policies can be decided on faster. Decision-making through treaties takes a long time and a centralised government will be able to respond quicker to problems and difficulties. In addition, a federal Europe will be much more efficient. There will be just one central government that carries out all tasks and not 27 member-states that do these tasks separately, when most of these tasks are in fact much alike. The federal government will be able to bundle all its knowledge and there will be more specialization possible on the European level. However, I recognize that it will be difficult to further integrate because of economic and cultural differences. I hope that in the future there will exist a strong unified Europe in which all European citizens feel united and view themselves as being European. This does not mean, however, that the national cultures have to disappear. Every citizen should have a national and European identity, which exist next to each other.

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