

Part 1: Remodelling the European Union

Chapter One

Decoupling and Federalizing: Europe after the Multiple Crises

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Abstract

The 2010s multiple crises brought to the surface of European politics a division on the very rationale of the integration project. The latter has been challenged by nationalistic parties and governments under the banner of sovereignism. In fact, the dramatic consequences of secession (from the EU) even for a country such as the United Kingdom have led to an interpretation of nationalism as sovereignism within the EU rather than secession from the EU. To weaken the sovereignist challenge, it is necessary to free the EU from the tyranny of 'one size fits all', acknowledging the difference between the countries that need or want to move towards an 'evercloser union' and those which wish to participate only in a single market. This acknowledgement should lead to negotiations, between national and community leaders, for institutionalizing, within the single market, a distinct federal union (around the Eurozone member states), governing traditional core state power policies through a separation of power system. This would amount to a necessary differentiation for undermining the sovereignist challenge. The single market and the federal union should have different legal settings, although the member states of the latter would participate in the functioning of the former, according to rules that would prevent them acting en bloc. Decoupling is a condition for bringing federalism back again to the European integration project, although the federal model which should serve this purpose needs to be based on the experience of federations formed by aggregation and not disaggregation.

Introduction

Since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the EU has come to be structured on a dual constitutional or governance regime: supranational in the policies of the single market and intergovernmental in the policies concerning traditional core state powers. The 2009 Lisbon Treaty abolished the pillar structure introduced in Maastricht, but it kept the basic distinction between governance regimes. The supranational governance is organized around a triangulation between the European Commission (which has the monopoly of legislative initiative), the Council of Ministers or Council (representing

the functional ministers of national governments) and the European Parliament (elected directly by the European citizens since 1979), both having the legislative power of approving Commission proposals, with the European Court of Justice playing the role of supervising the constitutionality of directives and regulations approved by the two legislative chambers. Intergovernmental governance circumscribes the decision-making power to the institutions representing national governments, the Council, and particularly the European Council of national government leaders), thus delimiting the role of supranational institutions (such as the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice) (Fabbrini, 2015). This differentiation in governance has to do with the nature of the policies at stake. When the policies concern core state powers (such as security, foreign relations, home affairs and asylum policy, migration or the economic policy of the single currency area – here defined as Eurozone), then national governments claim to keep control in their hands, while this is not the case for the single market policies which are of low political salience (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2014).

The multiple crises of the 2010s have affected the intergovernmental regime. They have shown the institutional inadequacy of the latter in facing existential threats. This, however, does not mean that we should assume that the supranational regime would have guaranteed a better outcome. Nevertheless, the intergovernmental governance of the multiple crises brought to the surface of European politics new divisions among EU member states and within each of them. Particularly, it led (for the first time) to divisions on the very rationale of the integration project. The latter has been challenged by nationalist and populist parties and movements that created a 'holy alliance' under the banner of sovereigntism in order to claim more decision-making autonomy for the 'nation states' within the EU framework. In fact, the dramatic consequences of secession (from the EU), even for a country such as the United Kingdom, have led to an interpretation of nationalism as sovereigntism within the EU rather than secession from the EU. Post-Brexit sovereigntists want to remain within the EU, although they aim to hollow it out (i.e. bring it back to the status of an economic community, forgetting the aim of building an 'ever closer union'). Sovereigntist forces not only have a hard time with the interdependencies of the EU system, but also with the checks and balances rooted or introduced in the national systems. Indeed, when they get full control of national governmental power, as in Hungary or Poland (Kelemen, 2015), they have not hesitated from weakening the rule of law foundations of their nation state. Sovereigntist political forces have gained control of several national governments in east and central Europe, and are becoming increasingly influential in the political processes of several countries in western Europe (as in Italy after the parliamentary elections of March 4, 2018, see Jones, 2018).

The 'holy' alliance between populism and nationalism has led to the re-affirmation of the principle of national sovereignty (sovereigntism) because of the institutional weakness of the integration process. Certainly, nationalist populism in western

Europe has been fed by social inequalities which the governance of the Eurozone has been unable to prevent, but it has also been strengthened (Matthijs, 2017) by badly managed migration and security policies. On the other hand, the populist nationalism of east Europe has been fed mainly by the challenges to identity produced by mass immigration of third country nationals which the EU has had difficulty in governing through a comprehensive approach. The multiple crises have been due to objective factors, such as speculation on financial markets, irresponsible policies in managing national budgets, and mass movements of populations to escape hardship or wars; but their effects have been amplified by the inadequacy of the intergovernmental system designed to govern those factors. This inadequacy is the result of interstate compromises which have proven insufficient compared to the challenges to be faced (Fabbrini, 2019a); compromises that reflected different state views on the project of integration. Those compromises have prevented the EU from acting effectively and legitimately, thus feeding the ill-ease which is manipulated by populists and nationalists. In addition, those compromises have differentiated the EU internally, but without weakening the orthodoxy which has continued to defend the principle that the integration process must continue to be unitary and inclusive. However, there cannot be one solution for different situations. The idea of one size fits all (well criticized by Schmidt, 2016) has produced uncertain policies, which for some are too limited and for others too invasive. This is all to the benefit of sovereignists. Here, I will proceed as follows. First of all, I will discuss the intergovernmental implications on the EU as a unitary organization. Secondly, I will conceptualize the strategies for going beyond the crises, arguing on the need to decouple the EU into a political union within an economic community. Thirdly, I will elaborate the model of the federal union as the institutional form for the political union. Decoupling the EU is thus the condition for recovering the federal project in Europe. I will then conclude by bringing home my main argument.

The implications of intergovernmentalism

The EU's uncertainty in dealing with the euro crisis, the arrival in Europe of a massive number of political refugees and economic migrants, and terrorist attacks on the civilian population in European cities can be considered as being co-responsible for the rise of anti-Europeanism across all the EU member states. That uncertainty has been due not only to the magnitude of the challenges, but also to the lack of effectiveness and legitimacy of the intergovernmental governance regime (through which those crises were handled), particularly when it operates under crises conditions. The mismatch between intergovernmental decisions and democratic politics could not fail to generate a popular reaction, specifically in those member states (in southern Europe) which encountered more structural and cultural difficulties in adjusting to the political economy's model consistent with the operation of the Stability and

Growth Pact or SGP (Matthijs and Blyth, 2015). It is not simply a matter of justifying who has governed badly in the past. Far from it.

However, the model of convergence, if not of uniformity, between national policies implicit in the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and protected by the series of intergovernmental treaties and rules approved in the past decade, ended up favouring some countries and penalising others. Hence the popular reaction against policies which were perceived as the outcome of decisions taken by supranational technocracies (from the Commission to the other independent agencies, such as the European Central Bank), but which were in fact taken by national governments who entrusted those technocrats to implement them. During the euro crisis, decisions were taken through mediation among the national governments belonging to the Eurozone, in a political climate of reciprocal distrust. A distrust that asked for more integrative rules to keep it under control (Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier, 2016). Of course, a system of economic governance based exclusively on administrative rules cannot give political answers to the continuously changing conditions of the economic context. Necessarily, such a system is politically irresponsible. Indeed, the citizens dissatisfied with the Eurozone's decisions ended up voting down domestic incumbent governments, notwithstanding that none of them was singularly responsible for the decisions collegially taken.

This is true not only for economic policies, but also for other intergovernmental policies considered sensitive by national governments, such as immigration. The immigration of millions of people into Europe (a fact of historical nature) was addressed, by the various national governments, on the basis of specific electoral calculations (a fact of contingent importance). The EU's inability to manage this massive flow of people into European countries (and particularly into some of them) has continued to justify populist mobilisation with its clear (but ineffective) request to shut down national borders. Nationalist sentiments have found fertile ground in fears of threats to the identity of citizens. It has been the inadequacy of a migration policy based on agreement among the national governments which has exasperated the problem; admittedly of a significant and sometimes dramatic scale (Krastev, 2017). After all, how could it have been possible to conceive the building of an area for the free circulation of people among member states of the EU (the so-called Schengen area), without simultaneously planning a common protection of the borders of that area? It is the same logic which is institutionalized in the Eurozone: a single currency without a single budget managed by a single authority. National governments have strenuously defended the principle that it is their duty to control their own territory, even if this principle is empirically contradicted by their inability to ensure such control. And yet, despite the repeated waves of immigrant arrivals which have occurred since the start of the 2010s (and particularly in the period 2015–16), the EU has not managed to come up with a single policy to manage immigration. The Dublin Agreements are still in force (albeit revised several times) and according to them it is the responsibility of the country of first arrival to handle the registration

and management of immigrants, with penalising (economic and organisational) effects for some countries but not for others. Only at the end of 2016 was a small step taken with the strengthening of FRONTEX, the European border and coastal control agency – small, since its duty remains that of supplementing national border agencies where necessary, but not of guaranteeing (independently from the national agencies) protection from outside the area of free internal circulation.

Migration policy has confirmed the paradox of intergovernmental integration. There is no European policy on immigration owing to the resistance of member states which want to preserve sovereignty over their national territory. However, those countries are not capable of guaranteeing that sovereignty given the size of the migratory phenomena. Thus, the absence of a European immigration policy increases citizens' feeling of dissatisfaction towards the EU, which is in turn criticised of being insensitive to the fears and insecurity that immigration produces in national societies. All in all, a real disaster. The wish to preserve national sovereignty over migration policy (territorial sovereignty) as well as over economic policy (fiscal sovereignty), and the conflicts between those sovereignties, has engendered reciprocal mistrust between these sovereignties and has led either to policy stalemate or to delegation of power to the Commission. A lack of responsibility has fostered in the Eurozone, the dissatisfaction of citizens in the debtor countries owing to the excessive rigidity of the rules, and the dissatisfaction of citizens in the creditor countries who think that the rules are not rigid enough. Again, it is against the Commission that the anger of the governments of Eastern Europe has been directed for having proposed a system of allocating national quotas of political refugees. Similarly, the anger of the governments of southern Europe has also been directed against the Commission for not having done enough to lighten the burden of handling the refugees that have landed on their coasts. The result has been that, while the Commission has sought to do its best to make a virtue out of a vice by preserving a European interest in a context where national visions and ambitions have held sway, citizens have directed their ill-ease towards the EU due to the decision-making system which their governments have built in Brussels.

In the context of crises which have distributive effects and identity implications, the intergovernmental model has brought to the surface the deep differences of interests and views between the EU member states. Because those effects and implications have been politicized by the new sovereigntist forces, the intergovernmental governance could not easily accommodate the differences between national governments. Moreover, facing decisions with enormous domestic impacts, the asymmetry between national governments which are coordinated in the European Council or in the functional Council of Ministers, has created real hierarchies of power. Politics as the struggle for the power to decide has crept back in through the window of the European Council, contributing to the stalemate of the latter's decision-making process (think, for example, of the stalemate in the third pillar of the banking union). This condition might even worsen with the leaders of sovereigntist parties taking

control of crucial member state governments (such as France and Italy) which opens the door for them to participate in intergovernmental governance. Since the European Council is considered an institution which is self-centred, in other words an institution which does not require checks and balances at the EU level from the European Parliament, because it is presumed to be controlled by the distinct national parliaments (a fact empirically implausible), the sovereigntist leaders could undermine the integration process from within. Nevertheless, the opinion persists that the divisions between states can be managed through ordinary negotiation within the intergovernmental governance regime. It would not be the first time in Europe that sleepwalking governments have headed blissfully towards the abyss (Clark, 2014).

Strategies beyond the crises

It may be argued that the multiple crises, Brexit, the control of government by sovereigntist parties in eastern Europe, the growing influence of sovereigntist movements in western and southern Europe, the divisive pressure generated by both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin on the EU, will not produce radical alterations in the European geo-political situation. The economic recovery of the Eurozone will reduce the sovereigntist pressure, Brexit should not be overstated given that it is the expression of the idiosyncrasy of an island, the U.S. neo-nationalism cannot structurally last for too long and Russia is after all an economic dwarf. If this is the case, then, within the unitary legal order of the EU, a strategy may be pursued for preserving the current double governance framework. However, the neutralization of sovereigntist challenges requires much more than business as usual (as well argued by Tsoukalis, 2016). In fact, this strategy would contribute to increasing dissatisfaction on the part of those who support the EU (because of the ineffectiveness of the policies pursued), without winning over the consensus of those who are against the EU (because they do not recognize its legitimacy). The diffusion and politicization of sovereigntist sentiments cannot be addressed by proposing the old combination of policies or hiding integration's aims. Certainly, the force of administrative inertia, the resistance of bureaucratic interests and the short-sightedness of politics must not be underestimated. The pressure to go on as before is not only substantial, but institutionalised. Sovereignism, however, can be defeated by a bold vision of Europe's future, not only by the defence of existing procedures or by a 'To Do' List (as argued by Merritt, 2016, p. 229).

If one instead accepts the argument that the EU policy differentiation is making its functioning inefficient and its legitimacy opaque, and that this has contributed to the politicization (by the new political actors) of popular dissatisfaction against the European integration project, then a simple strategy of continuity cannot be easily justified. If the consequences of the multiple crises are recognised, including their politicization by sovereigntist movements and parties (Hooghe and Marks,

2019), and the emergence of diverse interests and values among the member states, then it is necessary to think of a strategy of discontinuity, for the very reason that being radically discontinuous (compared to the past) is the condition in which the EU already finds itself. This strategy is based on the acknowledgement of the basic differences, generated by the identity clash, which has emerged between member states on the finalité of the integration project. This acknowledgement justifies the decoupling of the current EU into two organizations, an economic community and a political union. This strategy requires a double preliminary act to be agreed by national and European leaders, a first act for distinguishing the political and the economic projects of integration and a second act for defining the nature of the political project. In the latter case, a statement of political intent (a political compact) should plausibly be signed by the leaders of the core members of the Eurozone, a commitment to move towards a political union operating within the single market. The organization of the single market would remain open to all European states, including the old non-member states such as Norway and the new non-member states such as the United Kingdom. The political compact should then lead to a redefinition of the institutional bases of an 'ever closer union'. It is not wise to return to the experience of the Constitutional Convention of Brussels of 2002–03, with the vetoes and influence-mongering which characterised it. It is a question rather of agreeing, between the leaders of both national governments and the EU institutions, on the possibility of starting a process of constitutional differentiation for creating two organisations based on distinct legal orders, despite living within the same economic community. This would be ushered in by a negotiated agreement that would benefit both those who want or need to set up the political union, and those who desire or need to participate only in the project of an economic community. Without that preliminary political act, it is unlikely that this strategy might one day lead to a constitutionally defined political union.

Of course, in the current EU, it would be difficult, but not impossible, to distinguish the economic and political spheres of the integration process. Moreover, this strategy would also face numerous problems, of both a procedural and institutional nature. The procedural problem concerns the question of how to separate a core composed of Eurozone member states from those interested only in the functioning of the single market. If the rhetoric of a united Europe within a single framework is abandoned and there is an agreement on the fact that it is possible to answer differently to different needs and perspectives, while maintaining a common economic and security basis, then these problems can be pragmatically discussed and resolved through negotiations between national and community leaders (for example, in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe that the Commission chaired by Ursula von der Leyen has committed to promote). The institutional problem concerns how to engineer the carving out of the institutional framework of the political union from the current institutional framework of the EU. It is not advisable to create new institutions because that would unnecessarily increase complexity. It is rather

plausible to organize differently the relations between the existing institutions for the different purposes that they should pursue. The solution of both problems requires the mutual recognition of the legitimate needs of the two groups of member states.

The decoupling of the Lisbon Treaty depends on negotiations that should generate a positive-sum outcome because it would allow the creation of different institutional spaces for different integration aims. A pluralistic Europe should be based on a political pact between the core countries of the Eurozone, which would become the fulcrum for managing other crucial core state policies, and an economic pact between the latter and the other countries which are part of, or only want to be in, the single market. The two pacts must be capable of differentiation at the legal level, since they aim to meet distinct needs. The countries which sign both pacts must maintain a solid link within the supranational framework of the single market. At the same time, the political pact should lead to redefinition of the institutional framework, moving towards the model of a federal union (not of a federal state). A federal union consists of an aggregation of previously independent states (such as the United States and Switzerland), whereas a federal state emerges from the disaggregation of previously unitary states (as is the case of Germany, Austria, Belgium, in Europe, or Australia and to a certain extent Canada, outside Europe). If the political union takes the form of a 'federation of nation states' (to use Jacques Delors' words), then the latter's differences and rivalries can be reconciled only by a system of multiple separation of powers which is a characteristic of federal unions (Fabbrini, 2019b). Indeed, the fusion of power of the central governing institutions (as in parliamentary governance) is a characteristic of federal states (on the different federal models, see Stepan, 1999; Sbragia, 1992). The federal union requires a preliminary constitutional pact or political compact between its constituent members, a pact/compact that should be the depository of the federal union's sovereignty for the policies allocated to the federal centre (while member state sovereignties should be enshrined in their national constitutions). The multiple separation of powers would prevent the formation of institutionalized hierarchies between constituent members (Fabbrini, 2010), thus making it possible to keep in the same organisation large and small states, states with strong and weak institutional configurations, states with diverse national identities.

The European federal union should not come into being by replacing national democracies with a supranational democracy, nation states with a supranational state, and national peoples with a supranational people. As with other federal unions, the European federal union should be a compound polity (Fabbrini, 2010) since it accommodates national democracies with the supranational democracy, distinguishing the policies which are subject to the control of the former and those subject to the governance of the latter. It should be the contrary of what has been created in the intergovernmental Eurozone, where it is increasingly difficult to distinguish national and European competences, national and European

responsibilities, in accordance with a logic which, by fusing the levels of government, prevents the distinction of responsibilities proper to each level. A federal union should also be different from a parliamentary federation (such as Germany) with its fusion of horizontal powers which would increase the influence of the larger states on the smaller ones, because of their more numerous representation in the European Parliament. Through the separation of policies which would be governed nationally and those which would be governed supra-nationally, it would be possible to allow voters to have their say at the level that those policies were decided, thus making the decision-makers accountable to voters – which is a necessary condition for reducing anti-Europeanism. Sovereignism has been in fact fed by the citizens' frustration with an integration process which prevents them from influencing choices taken at the European level, choices that nevertheless affect their national situation.

If the European federal union wants to be a union between equals, then it is necessary to move towards an institutional system that prevents the formation of hierarchies between its member states and encourages decision-making based on checks and balances between institutions. These are aims which only the separation of powers, mitigated by appropriate mechanisms, can pursue. However, even the most effective of those mechanisms can do little, if they are not handled by political elites who are aware of the fragilities of a political union and who are thus willing to reach compromises between the member states and between the institutions grounded in the separation of powers. Democratic unions of states are condemned to live the daily miracle of functioning without a people, a government and a state (Fabbrini, 2017).

The logic of the federal union

It is true that the EU has become a highly differentiated organization (Leuffen, Rittberger and Schimmelfennig (2013), but it is also true that such differentiation has led the EU into a constitutional conundrum (Fabbrini, 2016). Moving from policy differentiation to constitutional decoupling can free the EU from opacity, hierarchy and stalemate. Two organisations can be formed, each engaged in the pursuit of different ends, on the bases of differing agreements, while still being linked by what unites them, the single market as well as the security alliance (NATO). While the economic community can be organised around an interstate treaty which must not call into question national sovereignty as regard core state powers (although it should equip itself with a basic supranational framework to regulate the single market and resolve disputes between different states and competing economic actors), the federal union must instead define the reasons for the supranational project because it concerns the sharing of traditional core state powers. A single market can function without the existence of a single currency, just as participation in such a market does not require the merging of control on foreign, military, intelligence policy, asylum or the management of home affairs (which should instead become the central powers

of the federal union). Of course, the single market also requires the sharing of basic values and institutions of the rule of law by its participants. It would be necessary to define the role of the federal union within the economic community, by introducing institutional expedients that can prevent the formation of a blocking majority by the union within the latter.

A federal union is not a federal state, because of its anti-centralizing logic. Federal unions are based on the principle of divided sovereignty between the federal centre and the federated states. Each of the two levels has sovereignty over the management of policies for which it is responsible and distinct democratic institutions are needed to implement the divided sovereignty. In a federal union, the levels of national and supranational authorities should be clearly separated. A federal union implies the definition of the limited competences of the federal centre, leaving all the rest to the federated states. A federal union is the opposite of what the EU has become; an organization functionally expanding its competences, in an institutional context of unclear lines of accountability. A federal union should be based on a preliminary definition of competences allocated to the federal centre and those which are left to the member states, although social and historical processes will inevitably challenge the boundary set in the preliminary definition. Any federal organization is intrinsically dynamic. If the policy competences are limited, it would be possible at the same time to exclude from the federal union's competences the possibility of opt-outs by one or more member states. The federal union's jurisdiction, in its policy domains, should have a general scope.

A federal union does not imply the existence of a single identity, as it is implied historically in unitary nation states but also in federations formed through the disaggregation of a previously unitary state (which is the case of federal states, with the exception of Canada where there are two distinct cultural identities). The existence of an exclusive identity is the pre-requisite of unitary organisations such as the nation state, but that identity is existent also in federal states with a homogeneous political culture (as in Germany). This has not been the case in federal unions (such as the United States and Switzerland). Contrary to neo-functional assumptions (Haas, 1958; Schmitter, 2002), in federations by aggregation, the transferring of the identity or the loyalty of the citizens from the state/canton level to the supra-state level would be unrealistic (although the political development of the federal union has increased the strength of the supra-state identity at detriment of the state/canton identity, more in the United States than Switzerland because of the international role of the former and the lack of it in the latter). In our case, a federal union would not aim to create a European identity for replacing the national ones, but it would aim to compound national and European identities (Fabbrini, 2019b). The single vision of identity, which continues to influence the most ardent supporters of European integration, is both the effect and cause of the predominance of the statist paradigm in European political culture. This paradigm requires the existence of a single and homogenous demos for legitimizing political authority. Between nationalism and

Europeanism there is instead a broad area of multiple and diverse identities. In a federal union, citizens can cultivate their national identities and, at the same time, dialogue with the national identities of the other member state citizens. Only in this way they might together construct a new identity at the European level, added to (but not substituting) their national identities. One cannot exclude that the process of federalization would end in creating a more powerful European identity than national ones, but that would be an outcome and not a pre-requisite. The federal union, indeed, should function also with many distinct national or regional demoi (Nicolaidis, 2013), i.e. with plural citizenships having different national or subnational identities, although accepting to share basic European values and norms. Separate identities would be congenial to separate institutions of governance.

What unites national and subnational citizens of a federal union must be a political pact, the adherence to political values, the respect for the procedures and institutions substantiating that pact. Only politics, and its democratic underpinning, can unite those diverse national identities. The historic error of Europeanism was that of wanting to build a European cultural identity to replace national cultural identities, as well as construct a European federal state to replace the various nation states. It is no coincidence that every attempt to unite Europeans culturally has produced exactly the opposite; it has divided them, since European pluralism can never be enclosed in a single cultural identity. The European identity must be political, while national identities will continue to be cultural. Then it is only time and history which will show us the outcome of the interaction between the two. Every attempt to centralize authority in Europe historically led to an increase in conflicts between states or groups of them. For this reason, the federal union needs a constitution which not only legitimizes it, but also sets the limits to its powers. A federal union is necessary for limiting (federal) power, not for expanding it. This would help to contain the nationalist urges within its member states and facilitate the taking of legitimate decisions on issues of common interest, without at the same time undermining national democracies as happens when supranational institutions invade policies that pertain to the nation state. Moreover, a federal union, with its constitutional culture, is also a bulwark against the diffusion of illiberal sentiments that are spreading in Europe.

Conclusion

To weaken the 'holy' alliance between populism and nationalism, it is necessary to free the EU from the tyranny of 'one size fits all', distinguishing legally between the countries that need or want to move towards political integration, and those which wish to participate only in a single market. Recognising the legitimate right of the latter to preserve their national sovereignty, but involving them in the single market, would help to keep their nationalism in check. At the same time, institutionalising a distinct federal union (around the Eurozone member states), governing traditional

core state policies through a separation of power system, would certainly help undermine the populism fomented by inefficient and illegitimate intergovernmental governance. The single market and the federal union should have different legal settings, although the member states of the latter would participate in the functioning of the former, according to rules that would prevent them acting en bloc. Decoupling is thus a condition (also) for bringing federalism back again to the European integration project, although the federal model which should serve this purpose needs to be based on the experience of federations formed by aggregation and not disaggregation. Certainly, this means that the federal union will be smaller than the current EU. It will be smaller, but not small, especially if it corresponds to the core of the Eurozone. However, it will also be more united, because it would be held together by a political pact of constitutional significance that might also contain centrifugal pressures. Such a federal union would be a bulwark against politicized sovereignty, showing that it is possible to be part of a federal project without depleting national democratic institutions, without losing national cultural identities or without giving up legitimate national interests. Its existence would therefore be a factor of stabilisation for the whole continent. Theoretically, the model of the federal union could accommodate, within the same organization, the perspectives and claims of both sovereignist and Europeanist EU member states. That model is in fact based on the (negotiated) separation between the policies assigned to national sovereignties and those to European sovereignty. A federal union can be defined as a sovereign union of sovereign states, since the member states are sovereign on specific policies (self-rule) and the centre is sovereign on other policies (shared rule). Of course, the boundary between self-rule and shared rule is continuously moving, thus requiring a constant renegotiation of the boundary (i.e., of the policies to allocate to one or the other sovereignty). However, the adoption of this model in the EU would require the sharing of a common fate by the leaders of both sovereignist and Europeanist member states, a possibility undermined by the climate of politicization generated by the multiple crises of the current decade.

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