

Ten advantages of a European Federation

Leo Klinkers, March 2017

In 1776 thirteen British colonies in North America declared their independence. Eleven years later they established the federation of the United States of America. Since that moment England understood that it would lose its dozens of Colonies, Protectorates, Territories and Dominions if it would not bind the whole lot together within a federation. However, each attempt (as from 1803) to federalise the British Empire failed. In the meantime Canada, Australia, Malaya, Pakistan and India became federations. Nowadays the British Empire is no longer an 'Empire'. The word 'Great' in Great Britain does not have significance anymore. The United Kingdom is no longer 'United': if a hard Brexit is forced, Scotland and Northern Ireland might leave the Kingdom.

By opting for a federal form of state America increased from 13 to 50 states and became the most powerful country in the world. Due to not opting for a federal structure – despite the enormous societal efforts and movements in England between 1803 and 1940 to federalize the Empire – Great Britain shrunk from being an Empire to an island with – probably – only two regions in the near future: England and Wales. And a handful of Territories like the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar.

What is the lesson? The success of the American federation is based on a bottom-up process, the ratification of a federal Constitution by the people. The failure of numerous attempts within England – during 140 years – to federalise the Empire is based on top-down political mismanagement. This illustrates the disintegration of the European Union.

What then, are the ten advantages of a European Federation?

1. A Federation guarantees the age-old need for popular sovereignty by the American invention in 1787 of the concept of 'shared sovereignty': all sovereignty rests with the people, but the people grants some powers to a federal authority to take care of a limitative array of common interests and concerns.
2. In a Federation the member states keep their sovereignty and get even something extra, namely a federal authority that will take care of interests and concerns that an individual member state itself cannot take care of; for instance controlling the climate change, the economy, the social security, the defence against wars and terrorism, the shelter of refugees et cetera.
3. Unlike the European Union the federal authority cannot take top-down decisions about other subjects than the subjects that have been granted to the federal organ, let alone that this federal organ can pass by the parliaments of the member states.
4. In a Federation the member states' institutions remain the same: their parliaments, administrations and judicial branches, and all other institutes that belong to the essence of that member state, including Kings and Queens.

5. In a Federation the legal foundation is a Constitution, which – unlike the EU Treaty of Lisbon – does not have any exception (opt-outs) on a small amount of general binding rules.
6. In a Federation member states do not have the urge to feed their existence by waging wars. Unlike the nation-state - with its closed borders and inward oriented sovereignty - being the main cause of the many wars on the European continent as from the birth of the Westphalian nation-state in 1648.
7. In a Federation there is – unlike the EU – no centrally imposed uniformity (forced assimilation). Member states remain as they are qua culture, language, and identity.
8. In a Federation competition between Member States remains. For instance by offering a better education system or lower taxes.
9. The statement that a Federation is a super-state, which absorbs the sovereignty of the member states, and that a Federation requires one people, with one language and one culture, is misleading. The federal India – for instance – guarantees constitutionally no less than 22 official languages.
10. To give heterogeneous countries, which want and must co-operate, a formidable constitutional foundation, the Federal form of state is the most powerful one. For that reason already 40% of the world population is living within twenty-eight federations.