

# SUPRANATIONALISM AND THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY

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The European Union of today finds itself at a critical juncture; with the rise of euroscepticism and upcoming aftermath of British departure, it is placed in a position where it must democratize its institutions to persevere.

Doing so, perhaps paradoxically, can no longer be accomplished through European disintegration or the current intergovernmental approach, but instead requires closer integration and further federalization.

Cooperation in recent decades amongst European states has been vital to securing stability in a historically tumultuous region. In that regard, the current intergovernmental framework of the EU has been effective by enabling coordination between European states, working to mitigate conflicts, and ensuring some form of economic benefit to all member states.

While the intergovernmental framework may seem to some like a perfectly viable long-term approach, as it enables European nation states to retain a large degree of independence and the ability to opt-out of certain EU legislation, its result is that most decision-making institutions within the EU are undemocratic.

Under the intergovernmental framework, most levers of power are rested within the two Executive bodies of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Council, which are hardly subjected to the same democratic scrutiny as the European parliament.

This approach results in the democratically elected European parliament lacking the ability to propose bills or take other forms of legislative initiative, preventing the creation of the sort of feedback loop that characterizes interactions between government and constituents in federations.

The intergovernmental system between European states has provided such a level of coordination and stability on the continent, that European governments will always strive to maintain it in some capacity. The alternative of complete disintegration is unappealing, as it creates uncertainty and weakens each government's ability to exert influence abroad.

Maintaining the current system is also not an option, as its undemocratic nature will continue to alienate and inflame constituents within each member state. Without reform euroscepticism will only grow and it becomes ever more likely that the Union collapses.

There is also the issue of foreign policy, as the world becomes increasingly multipolar between the axes of the United States, China, Russia, and perhaps eventually India; a united European power bloc provides a better means for each member state to secure their interests on the world stage.

European governments occupy a much stronger bargaining position against foreign powers when

operating as a unified bloc. Individual European states are already becoming less capable of projecting influence on the global stage, but through the economic power of a unified European bloc they would have an avenue to do so.

Such a bloc united under current European ethos which prioritizes diplomacy and peacekeeping could also serve as an essential balancing power in a multipolar world. With strong economic and political influence, it is placed in a position to facilitate cooperation between large powers and display a more pacifistic model of foreign relations.

How should such a bloc come to be and why would Europeans favour it?

The answer to the former, lies not in disintegration or continued intergovernmentalism, but instead in federalism and greater integration.

Federalism in a European context would certainly share some similarities with familiar models such as the United States, however for it function in Europe, it would have work within a framework that strongly emphasize the rights and importance of the nation-state and enshrines those principles within its constitution, while also incorporating a balance of autonomy and fair representation.

A supranational European federation would not be able to operate on exactly the same principles as a traditional intranational federation, it would have to be based on inter-state cooperation and give each state the opportunity to enshrine its rights in a federal constitution that it and its constituents can agree upon.

This constitution would need encompass core points of European ideology that transcend each nation-state, with said points of ideological agreement creating the core of a reformed EU and serving as the fundamental principals under which a common, democratic constitution would be established upon.

Such a constitution could establish mechanisms to ensure stability and prosperity for European citizens that partake in the newly established supranational structure and build frameworks for them to directly interact and democratically secure their own interests within it.

A parliament with more legislative and budgetary authority than that of the current EU alongside an executive branch derived from the parliament or directly chosen by European citizens would be the most essential of these frameworks.

It would curb the excess of unchecked executive power in the current EU by rendering the European Commission obsolete, and instead, vest its power in the European parliament, an institution that can be checked and regulated by European citizens.

Once more, however, I emphasize that a European version of federalism would necessarily have to

have some key differences to the American to be democratic and long-lasting.

American and other traditional forms of federalism define their union as one of "one people", in the European context this will initially certainly not be the case. That recognition exists even within the current EU which instead aims for "an ever more closer union".

Therefore, a federalized European Union would initially need to be based on shared ideology and a shared constitution that forms the grounds for a state bonded on civic grounds.

The rights of nation-states would need to be protected for a federalized EU constitution to be ratified, therefore it could not overtake the nation-state as a national unit in its own right, but instead would form a Supranational entity that integrates each nation as a core constituent.

Relatively autonomous nation-states alongside a strong, democratically-elected European parliament ensure that citizens of the Union could secure their interests via national and supranational institutions, with the latter being able to coordinate mutually-beneficial policies across borders.

European citizens would find themselves better represented and better able to externalize their concerns to a European Union with institutions that allow for direct feedback, which as a result would possess greater ability to respond to constituents.

Thus, a federalized and more closely integrated European Union would be looked upon more favourably by Europeans than the intergovernmental iteration that exists today, as it would give them avenues to select decision-makers and would result in the democratization of the institution as a whole.

Regardless, the European Union has reached a point where it must work to reform its institutions, whichever route is chosen, democratization is pivotal to its survival.

***The photo shows, "Daniele Manin e Nicolò Tommaseo and the Republic of Venice," by Napoleone Nani, painted in 1876.***

