

Fundamentals of federalism

About me

Not an academic – person strongly committed in the struggle for E federation in a movement that has as founders Altiero Spinelli and Mario Albertini. Spinelli is considered as a founding father in Europe, with his Ventotene Manifesto and his long life action, starting with the Campaign for a federal Pact in 1950, and ending with the so called Spinelli Treaty in EP in 1979-1984.

Albertini cooperated with Spinelli since the beginning and was the one who elaborated the theory of federalism as a specific political thinking; most of his elaboration is not available rather than in Italian, unfortunately – though strict cooperation inside UEF with Federal Trust brought to the translation of some text in English. Anyway his intellectual work is of the utmost importance for a development of a theory of federalism, and one of our task will be to make it available for scholars and people engaged in the European struggle – though we will be able to do it when the urgency of the political battle will calm down a little bit (i.e.: when we will have reached our goal or when we will be definitely defeated...)

The fundamentals of Federalism

The first aspect related to the federalist theory is the institutional theory, i-e., what is a federal state. Mainly when you refer to federalism the definition of a federal system of institutions is the only aspect that is taken into consideration. It is still very controversial (there is not an accepted definition)– and it will be analyzed and developed as a concept in the further sessions. There is the important tradition in this field of the American federalism and the related debates, starting from *The Federalist* by Hamilton, Jay, Madison, through the literature of the first decades of USA life; but there are also many recent studies that define as federalists both loose, confederal systems of governance; and decentralised states that simply devolve to subnational entities competences and tasks, but in the frame of a institutional system whose source of power and legitimacy lies only in the centre government.

Here I just want to recall some criteria of definition and some characteristics.

Definition:

Albertini, and European federalism – here meant as a political movement – consider Wheare's theory of the federal government as a cornerstone. Wheare defines a very precise form of State based on the coexistence of multilayer levels of government: each of them is autonomous, and able to act in its fields of competences as it is equipped with own resources and own means of government

that are non depending on a different level of government; and all of them are coordinated, i.e. they share a federal constitution which assigns competences (usually very few ones and well defined to the federal level of government, and the many others to the member states which, in their turn, have their own constitution, can have subnational (regional) governments/principle of subsidiarity, etc.

Many more things to say on the institutional structure of a federal state, the division of powers, the check and balances, the question of subsidiarity- but it is not our argument.

Characteristics

- sovereignty lies in the people of the whole federation; but it is organized in such a way that it is exerted also, in the specific fields of their competences, by the member states and, if they exists, by regional governments. But yet: any way, when it comes to foreign relations, and foreign policy, and other key issues, it is the federation as such which is sovereign. **IMPLICATIONS** for us in E – Macron and a sovereign Europe, key issue, related to power to act, legitimacy and close relations to the citizens, capacity to act as a single political subject in the international frame.
- enlargement of the orbit of the State: unity in diversity means that you have an institutional model which offers an alternative to centralizing and homogenizing the power and the society. **IMPLICATIONS:** as the technological development creates the means to connect people and states, and as interdependence increases becoming global, federalism is the model for thinking how to govern this process. This is the reason why E as laboratory – but also which E is the right model. Because: not forms of cooperation, or international organisations, but the goal can only be a world federation which means creating a federal state at world level. It is not a goal for today, but it is a perspective and a criterion to understand in which direction politics must start building.

Peace

Federalism revolutionize the approach to the question of peace.

Internationalism consider peace as the effect of the existence of typology of governments that have a peaceful ideology, or are based on popular consensus (i.e. democracy), or are similar o one another and can easily cooperate. Power confrontation among sovereign states, which brings to war, can be eliminated by the good will of the governments, with the support of the people. Even pacifism is based on this assumption – we can abolish war simply choosing not to make it.

On the contrary, peace in the political elaboration of federalism in Europe, is the result of the removal of its structural causes. These causes, that lies at the root of war, are due to the international anarchy. The parallel is with the natural condition of human being when they live outside a political community in which a single authority takes it upon itself the control of force. Outside the rule is homo homini lupus – a state of permanent war, in order to survive; inside a political community (from the first ones, up to the contemporary democratic state) means that order and justice are ruled through law and implemented by institutions).

Obviously, as civilization grows, occasions and numbers of war diminish (though they may become, as we have seen and still see, even more destructive); but the point remains. Truce is not the solution. Peace means abolition of war, through the abolition of power relations among communities, which agree on living together under a Common Law; in this kind of situation, also violence, in the profound sense of the word, can disappear, basically. A society living in real peace – not worrying about war, and not even having the possibility to make war - educate a more civilized people, and do not have to impose compromises on its citizens respect to universal values and personal ethics (think to soldiers).

On the other side, one of the key landmarks (point) for federalists in their analyses is the consciousness that until humanity reach the final goal of world federation, collective violence and power confrontation remain a reality in the world – as regards power confrontation among states even the only rule (that can be put under control only when their interest coincide with cooperative relations). *Raison d'etat* is the fundamental law in politics, and if we want to make it evolve we must always keep it in mind. So, even revolutionary politics always have to face this fact; and this is why only a ethic of responsibility can work (Max Weber). The absolute ethic (Kant), i.e., acting ethically, whatever the consequences, is irresponsible in politics. It is a luxury that no one acting politically can afford. It does not mean cynicism or that all means are justified. Only that:

- 1) you must always consider the effect of your actions, and
- 2) if you want to build peace, proving to be against war is not enough, but the only solution is building federal unions.

This is not abstract. Means understanding sometimes, what is less damaging and choosing it, without dreaming of impossible solutions - think to migration, the drama that it represents and the need to face it, especially in the crises, only choosing the minor tragedy....

Values

Federalism in Europe, share liberal aspects and obviously democratic ones, but also refers to social justice and solidarity – and inclusiveness – that cannot but be realized through the welfare state.

European federation cannot but reflect all this:

- 1) it brings peace,
- 2) recognizes individual and civil rights,
- 3) is democratic and realizes a model of more participative democracy through subsidiarity and selfgovernment of local communities, which means more direct citizens involvement; also
- 4) the idea of a social market economy is constitutive of European federalism, though it can be implemented with different sensitiveness, according to the right or left