



Governing Globalisation to Overcome Nation-Based Fears: Federalism as the Paradigm of the Contemporary Age

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1. Introduction

One of the thorniest consequences of the present un-ruled globalisation is the impossibility of linking social issues, economic uncertainties and military threats to a specific “culpable” state: terrorism, for instance, strikes from both outside and within. Hence, the collective perception of living in an age of confused instability and unmanageable disorder and the rise of insecurity-related fears, mostly of a cultural, economic, epidemic or military invasion by “others”. The problem is quite tangible in Europe, where two apparently opposing political demands have been emerging: for more integration and common safeguards on one side, and for local self-government on the other. Not being properly answered either by EU member states or by the EU as a whole, these claims are degenerating into a schizophrenic attitude of micro-nationalism that still demands a protective umbrella from “upper”, albeit “foreign”, institutions.

The reason is readily apparent. The European Union is a federate-confederate hybrid: if, on the one hand, its common institutions are not entitled to fulfil all the political functions a fully sovereign State should perform, on the other its member States retain a full sovereignty which is too limited to handle issues of global proportions. The core of the problem clearly centres around the fact that the EU is rooted in a political “paradigm” that sees sovereignty in national States as the only possible form of statehood political thought can provide.

That is why in order to address the issue it might be revealing to recall the forerunner work of a group of Italian scholars who led the European Federalist Movement (EFM) starting from the mid-60s and its supranational organisation, the Union of European Federalists (UEF), from the 70s. They dedicated a great part of their political activity to a scientific and anticipatory examination of the globalisation process as a potentially “revolutionary event” and in redefining federalism accordingly. In fact, they conceived of federalism as a cultural and political “paradigm” fit for the contemporary age, able to decipher the global metamorphosis and, by virtue of an institutional schema showing both the final goal and the steps for achieving it, to turn it into an evolution: a twofold non-antithetical process of infra-national and supra-national global federalisation. Their investigation, covering a wide range of thematic issues (linguistic, ecologic, technological) was so deep and extensive that it is still relevant today, which the

present paper intends to demonstrate by highlighting two of its features. The first is an historical analysis. Federalists explained that 20th-century European national states had tried to counteract the exponential growth of interdependence, which they feared would entail a loss of power, by strengthening themselves and adopting nationalist, imperialist, militarist and autarchic policies, raising popular support also by leveraging collective fears. This seems to be still the case today on a more global and fatal level. The second feature is the new open and multi-levelled federal state model they conceived of as an answer to the above-mentioned demands by replacing the nation-centred world “system” with a lawful, balanced and democratic world “order”. Moreover, alongside this institutional “revolution” their federal theory involved a “revolution” in political values, notions and lexicon which might provide the conceptual keystone for turning international disorder and instability from something to fear into an opportunity to start a new era in world politics: the era of international democracy, through a progression of continental federalisations. This explains why federalists were persuaded that a gradually-built but truly federated Europe could serve as the new political evolutionary “model” for the new global society.

2. Cultural Politics and the Federal Theory

The cultural approach to politics had been a typical feature of EFM militants since the mid-60s, when Mario Albertini’s period of leadership had begun. After an interval in the 70s, when the group focused on universal suffrage for the EP and monetary issues, the cultural approach was fully revised. The EFM believed that only political vanguards can recognize when a crisis is a symptom of an historical turning point, and therefore conceive of the right political theories to turn such moments into developments. In this regard, the key was European integration, a very peculiar event in which the normal connection between institutions (usually stable) and the historical process (normally mobile) is reversed. European institutions possessed a unique trait – the germ of federalism – which had given rise to something entirely new in the history of political processes: constitutional gradualism, which could be grasped only by following a radical remodelling of cultural, heuristic and political notions. This means that its political “translator” – federalism – had to be re-conceived as something more than an institutional schema: as a political doctrine providing ground-breaking goals, an original interpretation of historical events, and the relevant institutional innovations to control them. The task for the EFM was “huge” since “everything, from the neighbourhood to the UN, has to be rebuilt”¹; nevertheless, they provided a scientific description of federalism made up of three aspects – value, historical-social aspect and structural aspect – which were in line with contemporary issues².

¹ From M. Albertini’s report to the EFM Central Committee (28 April 1979), in *L’Unità Europea* (1979), n. 63, 4. See also Albertini 1980c : 5-9; Albertini 1980b : 156-168.

² It was designed mainly by Albertini, whose most comprehensive work on the subject is Albertini Mario (1979a). Guido Montani described federalism as a sort of joint modernization of liberalism and socialism, which might provide a new model of a mixed economy and of democratic planning (Montani 1979 : 4-30). On this topic and on Albertini’s theories, see militants’ later studies: Levi 1987 : 97-136; Levi 2002b; Montani 1991 : 192- 236.

3. Federalism: the aspect of value

As far as the aspect of value is concerned, its first theorists (Kant and Hamilton above all others) had made clear that the goal of federalism is peace guaranteed by lawful institutions. Albertini showed that this goal presents an added “final” feature. Political values and aims pursued by “traditional” theories – liberalism, democracy and socialism – had in fact been realized only within national states, which means that freedom, equality and social justice were contingent on territorial and security priorities. But the pursuit of peace implies the eradication of national borders, which means that achieving federalism might unleash “the universal feature of the great revolutionary waves” and lead to liberalism, democracy and socialism in all their full potential (Albertini 1973 : 358). Federalism appears then to be the final “cultural revolution”, the last ring in a chain of historical experiences gradually emancipating humankind; the conclusive and homogeneous political culture providing an innovative comprehensive interpretation of the facts – the on-going historical process – the structure of the facts - their historical meaning and revolutionary impact unveiled by a new interpretative key - and the institutional prolongation of the facts - the institutional adjustments through which contemporary politics can control these facts³.

4. The historical process

The analysis of the ongoing process was based on two scientific assumptions which Albertini had explained in his earlier studies: a radical “confutation” of the concept of nation and a revised version of historical materialism. Regarding the first one, he proved that the nation is not an actual “political entity” but an ideological reflection of people’s sense of belonging to a precise form of state, bureaucratic and centralized, the recipient of an exclusive loyalty based on an alleged unity of language, culture and traditions⁴. As for the second one, he explained that the deterministic link between the evolution of the mode of production and political society generated interdependence not only in depth – the democratization of the decision-making process and the reduction of class conflicts – but also in breadth – the expansion of a political community beyond state borders. From this new point of view, the ongoing historical phase appeared as a two-fold structural process made up of a supranational intertwining and an infra-national deepening of the economic and social system. Four considerations followed. The first was that the emerging demands for common institutions and self-government were both legitimate as two parts of the same process. The second, that to manage this process a congruent evolution of statehood and sovereignty, both institutionally and territorially, was required. The third, that the ultimate cause of all contemporary crises was the inconsistency between the growth of interdependence and the national “size” of political power. The last, that traditional

³ See Albertini 1977 : 75-83 and his lecture to leading militants in the MFE (Pavia, 14-16 September 1979) as recounted in *L'Unità Europea* (1979), n. 67-68, 1-6. See also Rossolillo 1989 : 7-35; Rossolillo 1990 : 113-159; Pistone 2005 : 68-85.

⁴ The most important study is *Lo Stato nazionale* by Albertini. See also Levi 1975a : 4-34; Rossolillo 1975 : 35-43.

internationalism was bound to fail: based on the belief that national states are “natural” institutions, internationalism envisaged international peace as an automatic consequence of the full realization of freedom, democracy and social justice within states.

Therefore, Albertini proved scientifically what had been politically anticipated in the *Ventotene Manifesto*: in the contemporary scene all political programs assuming and defending national sovereignty, no matter how advanced they are in pursuing social justice and democracy and despite all political traditions, are conservative (Pistone 2013 : 10-48; Levi 1991b : 171-191). This explanation appears quite “predictive” if we consider how, nowadays, uncooperative and rejecting anti-UE demands, motivated by more or less explicitly nationalistic reasons, cut across the right and left national parties. This “anomaly” is rooted in the political inability of parties to grasp and cope with the ongoing historical process. Moreover, the loss of distinction regarding the traditional right-left division of political forces has resulted in a general loss of political credibility and in citizens’ bewilderment. This has created the perfect environment for the rise of populism, which thrives on political vacuums and insecurity.

5. The historical-social aspect of federalism: the structure of the facts

According to Albertini, the history of federations like the U.S. has taught us that citizens of a group of states which are more intertwined than a confederation but not as much as a central state would require, develop a non-hierarchical political multi-loyalism ending in the establishment of a federal state. Theoretically speaking, this means that when a society feels the need to extend the political community above and/or below the national level, federal institutions are both possible and necessary. And since multi-loyalism can theoretically range from the smallest local community to the global level, federal sociological quiddity, the “federal society”, can be described as a “political behaviour” made up of two poles: self-government and cosmopolitanism. Two poles that happen to match precisely the double interdependent pattern of the contemporary age. Hence, the historical-social aspect of federalism is fully displayed: centred as it is on the mobility of sovereignty, it is both the theoretical criterion for grasping the power feature of global issues and the practical methodology for turning these issues from a critical into a developmental trend. In other words, it is the political conceptual key to the contemporary age⁵.

⁵ The contemporary supranational and infranational trends and its connections with the governing of globalisation have also been highlighted by political scientists – e.g., Daniel J. Elazar – who have studied federalism as a historical-social process. They have described federalism as a “method” for political integration through the interweaving of interdependent power centers, suitable for internationalising and pluralistic societies (Friedrich 1968; Elazar 1995; Elazar 1998). Their analysis differs from that of Italian federalists in that it factors out the political role of institutions and, most of all, the specific effects of their features and differences. For instance, they envisage confederations as one of the possible steps in the ongoing federalisation process, while Italian scholars have based their whole theory on the political antithesis between confederal and federal systems, as illustrated in Kenneth Wheare’s work (Wheare 1946).

Federalists – mainly Sergio Pistone, Lucio Levi and Guido Montani – used this key to reinterpret past and present events as the consequence of a vicious cycle in which European national states had entered starting in the industrial revolution. From a historical point of view, they explained that states saw in the growth of interdependence a threat to their internal and external power, deciding to counteract this in the most conservative and therefore counterproductive way: by consolidating themselves and their sovereignty, both internally (nationalism and centralisation) and externally (imperialism and protectionism). To ensure people’s support for this strengthening process, governments stressed the need for security and leveraged collective fears of external menaces. But in doing so they enhanced international instability, which in turn worsened the whole situation, progressively engaging in warfare on the outside and authoritarianism on the inside, culminating in the outbreak of two World Wars and the rise of totalitarianism. From a political point of view, federalists described this cycle as the consequence of the erroneous application to the international framework of the “realist political paradigm”, which envisages security – the *raison d’état* – as the main goal of state politics. If security, and consequently peace, is ensured within national states by their full sovereignty, the same can’t occur amongst them, since there is no international sovereignty. At the international level, instead of law there is a permanent state of anarchy where all relations and all agreements are based on mere power. States have so far managed by establishing a world system based on a hierarchy of and/or balance among great, medium and small powers, and by accepting, especially after WWII, the constraints of cooperation in international bodies “as a lesser evil” (Montani 1993 : 12). But these are temporary palliatives: any state is entitled to ignore them whenever its security is threatened, and the vicious cycle begins all over again. To permanently break this cycle, a new form of international order based on law must be created, and more urgently after 1945, since the exponential growth of interdependence brought on by new technologies has made the realist paradigm increasingly unfit to cope with global challenges. Federalism, based as it is on the extension of state sovereignty beyond the national level, should replace it: by providing a new and independent theory of international relations, which traditional political thinking has always considered one of the many aspects of national internal affairs, it provides this new order. More importantly, it ensures security and erases any reason to fear anything that is extra-national as a potential or an actual threat⁶.

The federalists’ interpretation seems to have even more explanatory power today. The instability of the post-1989 multipolar system has escalated to an alarming and critical level: unmanaged power imbalances, migratory flows, monetary and financial chaos have been generating a general and deep crisis of political legitimacy. People have so far found their cohesive force in nationhood or in ethnicity, as opposed to a clear image of the enemy as a foreigner. In the new world they learn that the enemy is everywhere. Interdependence itself makes it impossible to retrace the exact point

⁶ See Pistone (ed.) 1973; Pistone 1975 : 95-110; Pistone 2002 : 235-257; Pistone 2016 : 16-35; Levi, Pistone 1981 : pages 80-102; Levi 1975b : 206-223.

of origin of danger; the enemy comes from outside the borders but also from within. National political life, unable to perform its traditional security function even within its borders, cannot but degenerate. People recognise that their states are inadequate to answer global-related issues, but since the dogma of national sovereignty prevents them from acknowledging any solution aside from aggressive self-defence, they feel disoriented and schizophrenically turn to the most ineffective solution: nationalist populism. Speaking of nationalist revivals, it is interesting to recall the federalists' view that the struggles for self-determination in the post-1989 Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were less related to democracy than to micro-nationalism. Rooted in the crisis of traditional political theories, which can no longer provide a state model suitable to the multipolar system, micro-nationalism gave the illusion of independence and security in an interdependent world, while in actuality it heightened discrimination, aggressiveness, violence and antidemocratic policies (Montani 1993 : 9-20). Today, after having infiltrated some movements for regional autonomy, micro-nationalism has been absorbed into populist political programmes and is slowly seeping into all political forces. Implacable collective fears, which kindle aggressiveness and vice-versa, are now more than ever both a symptom of the collapse of national states and the tool these states use to preserve themselves. A situation that is destined to spiral out of control.

6. The structural aspect of federalism: the “institutional prolongation of the facts”

As touched upon in the previous paragraph, federalists did not question the peace-making function of statehood; on the contrary, they believed national states were transient, a phase in the historical evolution of statehood itself, which should in fact evolve beyond them. That is why the federal paradigm had to also envisage a new institutional model, a new form of statehood consistent with the value and the interpretative key it provided – perpetual peace by legalising in-depth and in-breadth interdependence. Much more than just an institutional reform project, it in fact aimed at representing the constitutional type of the contemporary democratic state. Theoretically speaking, to fit the federal society this type should overcome the centralized nation-state both above and below by subsuming all political-administrative levels, from the most basic and smallest – the local community, the expression of autonomy – to the most elaborate and largest – the global federation, the expression of cosmopolitanism. Francesco Rossolillo, its main designer, named it “post-industrial federalism”⁷. He theorized a multi-levelled federal state hinging upon the political unit where self-government is in fact possible, which is the city-

⁷ He took inspiration from Walter Christaller's “central places” theory, which explains how settlements, absent disturbing elements, place themselves on the territory in a hierarchical structure based on production relationships that resemble concentric hexagons (Christaller 1933). The IT revolution and global interdependence were making it possible to dilute hierarchy: Christaller's formula could evolve in the region-city schema (Rossolillo 1983; Rossolillo 1984 : 122-137; Rossolillo 1985 : 88-109).

block, and embedded into a pacified political framework gradually expanding from the municipal, regional, national, and continental levels up to a prospected global state. To ensure a proper balance between local and general needs through a fully concerted and democratic decision-making chain, he devised a new “hyper-democratic” subsidiarity technique: “structured programming”. All levels, the jurisdictions and competences of which would be assigned according to territorial suitability rather than to a fixed subject-based division, would be independent and yet coordinated by virtue of the bicameral schema: every political “station” would be governed by a parliament with effective but not exclusive budgetary and legislative power and a senate representing the lower level. But the most important feature of post-industrial federalism was its gradual practicability and constant openness to enlargements: it was meant to be not just a theoretical description of the “final” institutional goal of federalism, but also a regulative schema providing the correct tools – supra-national unification and infra-national decentralization – to identify the proper reforms and, at a given time, to achieve them⁸. This feature of post-industrial federalism is extremely topical given recent events, and it might help in outlining innovative solutions.

7. The “progressive and revolutionary contents” of federalism

The intrinsic developmental dynamism is federal political *quid*, its “progressive and revolutionary” content (Albertini 1980a : 2). Eradicating international anarchy by a gradual process of global political unification, federalism eradicates the need for any aggressive and expulsive nationalism and paves the way for the development of a pluralist society living in a democratic global state free from any ethnic, linguistic or territorial borders. In such state, every individual has multiple political memberships, none of which are dominant, and is politically free not as a member of a class and/or of a nation but in himself, as a member of a local self-governed community as well as of a global political society. This means federal institutions, while developing, foster new cohesive values based on new conceptual tools and a new lexicon (multi-level governance, pluri-dimensional

⁸ The institutional features of the new federal state as detailed by F. Rossolillo help to mark the difference between post-industrial and integral federalism. Theorized mostly by French federalists and rooted in Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s political thinking, integral federalism also conceived of federal institutions as a self-government system centred around territorial communities and based on the principles of autonomy, cooperation, participation and subsidiarity. However, its main goal was to provide a new socio-economic, rather than political, model as an alternative to both capitalism and collectivism, while the “personalist” trend, represented mainly by Alexandre Marc, focused on the needs of the individuals (Marc 1961). For instance, integral federalists provided for a reform of bicameralism that included professional and corporative representation at all territorial levels (Aron, Marc 1948; Olivetti 1945). According to EFM members, who also took into consideration Proudhon’s work (Albertini 1974 : 565-632), integral federalism was too philosophical and, therefore, politically achievable only with difficulty; the political priority of its representatives was indeed the building of a federal society rather than of the European federation (Levi 2002b). Italian militants also opposed the later “regionalist” trend of integral federalism (Rossolillo 1992), which envisaged a European federation of regions absent the national level (Heraud 1966).

political loyalty and social identity, participatory democracy) which revolutionize all statehood-related notions. Citizenship first and foremost. Federalism destroys the citizenship-nationality conceptual link, turning it into an expression of universal rights, a multi-layered cosmopolitan status. Then there is the notion of people: rather than a fixed one, ethnical or territorial, it coincides with an ever-expanding pluralistic identity open to interdependence and constantly inclusive, glued as it is by the political project of global pacification. At the same time, multiculturalism and integration acquire new meanings: they describe the building of a political community able and willing to ensure everybody's freedom, autonomy and safety precisely by safeguarding equal and democratic coexistence through common institutions⁹. This means the federal point of view might be the only key to reviving contemporary politics, which is torn between the pressing demands of global interdependence and the anachronistic defence of national sovereignty; that is to say, "the only political thinking which permits concrete promotion of democratic ideals, in the era of interdependence" (Montani 1991 : 205).

8. The historical role of Europe

Federalists proved that the only effective strategy to cope with globalisation entails a federal rerouting of the international system. Ignoring or refusing to acknowledge this, and most of all refusing to renounce sovereignty, governments and politicians keep making a crucial mistake: they try and promote federal goals through intergovernmental means – international organisations – which have already been proven more than once to be inadequate. But in Europe, where national states have already transferred and/or devolved some of their powers both upwards, to supranational institutions designed to be constantly open, and downwards to local authorities, their exclusiveness has begun to be questioned and a new multi-ethnic and multi-loyal society to be built. This means that the history of EU integration might lead the way: as federalists have in fact proposed, analogous continental integration processes could start by launching Marshall Plan-like interventions in hot-spots like the Middle East and Africa and creating international agencies with independent authorities similar to the ECSC High Authority (Pistone 2016 : 16-35).

But today the EU is neither a federation nor a confederation. While this explains why it is in Europe that the contradictions tearing contemporary politics are most severe, it also implies that it is in Europe that they will end, either by exploding into the return of power politics or being eradicated by a new form of unified state. If the nationalist-federalist alternative represents the "compass" for the contemporary era (Montani 1991 : 204), the historical role and responsibility

⁹ See Rossolillo 1998 : 166-172; Rossolillo 1999 : 80-107; Levi 1993 : 80-86; Levi 1999 : 150-193; Levi 2002a : 203-234; Montani 1994 : 95-126.

of the EU should be clear: international democracy, the transition to a “world government”, and the resolution of international as well as internal political crises depend on the conclusion of the EU integration process and the foundation of the United States of Europe¹⁰.

9. Conclusions

Every great current of political thought has provided an idea of the best form of government. Since the *Ventotene Manifesto*, federalists have been intending to contribute to this “debate” by defining new goals and contents for political progress – the final overcoming of domination and power politics through a global supra-national and infra-national federalisation process – and conceiving of a new paradigm of statehood appropriate for a self-governed and fully democratic political community – the multi-level federal state – as a concrete solution to all “problems of the future of humankind” (Albertini 1979b : 167). In this framework, European institutions appear to be the first historical realization of an already on-going global process and to be acquiring a new meaning that might dispel citizens’ sense of incomprehension, replace this with a new sense of belonging.

However, what seems to be most relevant and topical is that federalists have made clear that a new historical process requires a new way of thinking and of describing society and institutions. By explaining that what appears to be unmanageable is just unmanaged and by showing how to fix it through international democracy, they have given us insight into a political paradigm able to explain that the claims for local autonomy and for supranational institutions are not antipodal and opposite, but two sides of the same coin: the crisis of the national state. More importantly, they have clarified that these goals can be achieved simultaneously and within a single political project which is “perfectly conceivable and un-contradictory within a federalist framework, since the relationships between different governments no longer depend on their relative military or economic power, but on the regulations of a common democratic constitution” (Montani 1993 : 15; Rossolillo 1978 : 172-177). In doing so, they have offered a different explanation for contemporary contradictions. Fears appear to be not a consequence of an actual fearsome situation but of an obsolete nation-based political point of view. Confusion and insecurity appear to be not a consequence of globalisation *per se* but of the self-defeating nation-based way of dealing with it. Their work suggests us, therefore, that social and political progress comes only from groundbreaking projects that allow us to design rather than fear the future, and to rule rather than endure events.

¹⁰ See Albertini 1977 : 75-83; Levi 1991a : 8-25; Levi 2009 : 14-42; Montani 1980 : 123-129; Montani 1997 : 126-176. In the historical role assigned to the European unification process lies the difference between EFM and world federalists, who believed world government could result either from the instant creation of a world federation (Reves 1945) or from the gradual extension of international law (Kelsen 1944; Clark, Sohn 1966).

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