



CENTRO STUDI SUL FEDERALISMO

DEMOCRACY IN DANGER

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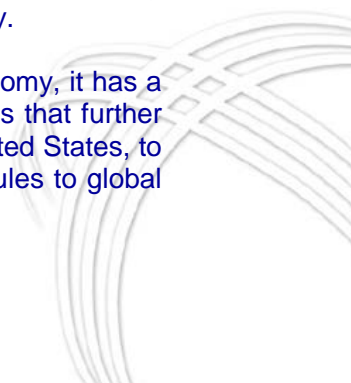
The future of humankind is facing life-threatening challenges: pandemics, atomic weapons, climate change, the rise of nationalism and the return of war. Political institutions, whose task is governing economic and social processes, have lost the capacity to cope with these threats.

The main contradiction of our time is between the dynamics of market and civil society (that have developed a global tendency) and the resistance offered by the states (that have sought to remain national). We are living in an era of scientific and technological revolution, which triggered the globalization process. Globalization is unifying the world on the structural plane, while politics – still dominated by the idea of nation – keeps it divided on the superstructural plane: the framework where political decisions are made. While globalization is drawing people in the same direction, national ideology divides them, and maintains the unequal distribution of wealth and power in the world.

The balance of power between states and markets has been reversed. Economics has gained the upper hand over politics, and finance over the real economy. The erosion of state sovereignty has brought about the decline of democracy. The decisions on which the future of humankind depends have shifted beyond national borders. The most important decisions are taken at the international level, while democratic institutions stop at state borders. A crisis of consent has ensued towards political institutions which has weakened the legitimacy of public powers. Consequently, owing to the decline of the state, private interests connected to the market have prevailed and brought about the decline of collective values. Where there are democratic institutions (at the national level), second rate decisions are taken. Where the most important decisions are taken, (at the international level), there are no democratic institutions. If democracy does not want to resign itself to being subject to the power of global markets and non-state actors, it should globalize itself. Two alternative projects are in competition; while federalism aims to globalize power and democracy, nationalism pursues a return to nation-states. Therefore, the operational framework of the dividing line drawn at Ventotene between reactionary and progressive forces, i.e. between nationalism and federalism, has become the entire world.

On the one hand, there are the old and falling nation-states. Especially in Europe, these have learnt that only regional unification can offer a chance to reach goals that cannot be achieved by individual states. At the same time, the national level of government can be used to contain ethnic nationalism and secessionist movements that are active in almost all states. Moreover, local self-government is the third pillar – alongside the national and the macroregional – of the new features which political institutions have adopted to ensure community participation. On the other hand, there are the macroregional states that are the building blocks of the emerging new global order, i.e. the successors of the leaders of the Cold War – the US and Russia, new protagonists in world politics and global economy, like China, India and Brazil, and regional organisations such as the EU, the most advanced unification experiment in the world. All these global actors, except the EU, still belong to the Westphalian world, are proud of their own identity and independence, and are opposed to the recognition of any supranational authority.

The EU can be the vehicle of democracy in the world. Being the largest global economy, it has a vital interest in keeping the global market open, and in strengthening the institutions that further this aim. This is the reason that has driven the EU, against the resistance of the United States, to promote the formation of the WTO, which developed from the need to apply new rules to global competition and to enforce them universally.



A European federation can play a pivotal role between East and West, and North and South, because, unlike the United States, it has a vital interest in developing cooperative relationships with the neighbouring areas of the ex-communist world, the Mediterranean and Africa. At the same time, it should strengthen the international institutions (OSCE, Cotonou Convention and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) that bind Europe to its neighbouring continents.

The EU is the laboratory of a new form of statehood based on the constitutionalization and democratization of international relations. The European Parliament is the first elected supranational parliament in history. Therefore, it can play the role of a model and a driver of the democratization process of the UN. A step along this path is a UN Parliamentary Assembly, and the transformation of the Security Council into the Council of the great regions of the world, that would enable all UN member states to be represented in the Security Council through their respective regional organizations.

Trump's nationalism is an infectious disease that has spread worldwide. Liberal-democracies are under attack from populist parties. Authoritarian leaders, often elected democratically, have profited from pandemics to intensify liberticide measures. The undemocratic model, championed by Putin and Xi Jinping, who have extended their hold on power beyond their term, is gaining ground. In Hungary, Orbán has assumed emergency powers to rule by decree for an indefinite time; Rwandan President Kagame has deployed soldiers across the country to enforce nationwide lockdown; Bolivia has postponed elections; in Israel, Netanyahu has used the pandemic to get his corruption trial postponed; Turkey, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Venezuela have imprisoned opposition activists, journalists, magistrates and all those who dared to criticize the government; and in Brazil, President Bolsonaro has been denounced at the ICC for crimes against humanity and genocide.

After having given the decisive push to the formation of the League of Nations and the United Nations, and having played, during the postwar period, the role of backbone of the global order, the US, under Trump has chosen "America first" as the formula that summarizes his political agenda. Domestically, Trump has rejected Islamic migrants, covered up white supremacists and police brutality, resorted to racial appeals and made the border wall with Mexico the symbol of a closed society. His foreign policy has been oriented toward the dismantling of international institutions and agreements that promote multilateralism and international cooperation. He announced the US's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia, the nuclear deal with Iran, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris climate agreements, the World Health Organization and has blocked the WTO from appointing new members to the panel that hears appeals in trade disputes. In conclusion, Trump's policy has formed a deep division both in the world and in the US. With or without Trump, the US should rediscover that its future is inseparably bound to a global partnership for peace and international democracy. Democracy is in danger. Democratic forces must mobilize.

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(The opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent the CSF)

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