I. Three visions for post-war Europe

"Let Europe arise!"
European Federalists and Winston Churchill

Federalists gathering on the shores of Lake Lucerne

It was quite a heterogenous party gathering ~~there~~ on the shores of ~~the~~ Lake Lucerne, at the Rütli meadow, ~~that~~ Friday, 20th September 1946 – some seventy people from sixteen different European countries~~,~~ swearing an oath, just like the representatives of the three original Swiss cantons had done ~~at the same place~~ back in 1291. But now the participants of the congress committed themselves to Europe, to European unification. Among them, a British officer who had served in India and argued in favour of a sort of European, regional version of ~~the still~~ young United Nations Organisation, empowered ~~with~~ a common army; a French couple trying to convince the ~~others~~ that Esperanto would unify the Europeans, and ~~the~~ whole world ~~indeed~~, ~~in~~ a federal regime; Dutch representatives of the European federalist movement ~~there~~, among them Hendrik Brugmans, former Secretary of State, who had announced a profound ~~renewal~~ of the Dutch society on the whole, but was repudiated by his own government, had been sent, ~~sort of exile,~~ to Bandoung, then still Dutch colonies, and ~~was just back~~; the Swiss European federalist movement had initiated the meeting, and even Germans – for the first time after the war – had been invited, not an easy decision ~~and in some countries bitterly criticized~~; but the ~~meeting~~ was to imagine ways of uniting Europe and that could hardly be achieved without the former enemy.

~~The~~ past three days ~~they~~ had sat together in a hotel ~~of~~ the small city of Hertenstein, just at the opposite shore of the beautiful lake, talking, deliberating, trying to understand ~~each other~~ – ~~and~~ they had ~~achieved~~ something astonishing, a one-page long coherent and ambitious "Charter", an outline of a "European Community ~~on~~ federal lines" in twelve points[i]. ~~The~~ fundamental idea is ~~deeply rooted in~~ nothing less than a common understanding of human dignity, insisting on "respect for the individual and his responsibility ~~for~~ the various communities to which he belongs." (§7). This commitment aims at much more than simply sharing power between two levels of government, as federalism is often reduced to; it refers to the "personalist" concept of mankind, which assumes that we all are individuals ~~indeed~~, but that our existence and identity ~~is~~ as much shaped by our belonging to others, to family, colleagues, villages and cities, regions ~~and~~ nations~~,~~ and beyond. ~~On this ground only~~, a European federation makes sense~~,~~ in the eyes of the Hertenstein group, and should be conceived as a bottom-up construction "beginning at the base" (§2), granting "the rights and duties of its citizens in a declaration of European civil rights" (§6)[ii]

~~Dignity, at the time, after~~ the threat of European-wide fascist dictatorship ~~meant after all and~~ above all, not only citizens' rights, but peace: A federal European Community was meant to grant peace for all ~~the~~ European nations living together on the continent, ~~it~~ meant solving conflict no longer by war – as Europe had ~~experienced~~ over so many centuries –, but by common rules, by law: "In accordance with federalist principles which call for a democratic structure […] the community of European peoples must itself settle any differences that may arise among its members." (§2) That means nothing less than a revolution of international relations as they had emerged in Europe since Early Modern Times, since state claimed

sovereignty, i.e. the supreme right to do ~~what they want~~, to deny any ~~interference of~~ whomsoever – th~~e~~ p~~r~~inciple of state power and international relations ~~Europe-wide~~ recognized in the W~~e~~stphalian Peace Trea~~t~~y, which had put an end to the devastating Thirty-Years-War~~, in 1648~~. Taken at face value, state sovereignty simply does not allow for an arbiter *beyond* the states~~, in case of conflict,~~ to take binding decisions – such an arbiter would be an ~~instance~~ superior to the states, and sovereignty ~~just~~ denies the legitimacy of something "beyond". Co~~n~~flicts ~~then~~ had to be solved without arbiter, ~~and that means~~ in the last resort the "law" of the strongest, i.e. violence~~,~~ and violence among states is nothing else than war. ~~War~~ had been an inbuilt device for conflict so~~l~~ving in the European system of international relations for centuries – it had led Europe to self-destruction in the 20th century. "Settle any differences in accordance with federal principles" would replace the system of international relations based on sovereignty by the recognition of a legitimate arbiter beyond the nation state, entitled ~~to take~~ binding decisions, i.e. to substitute ~~law to violence~~.

The self-destruction of the former European "Great Powers" and the whole system of international relations in Europe did not only require a revolutionary shift of the relations ~~between the~~ Europeans themselves; it had given rise to the "Super-Powers", the USA and the Soviet Union, who were about to dominate the post-war world~~, and~~ Europe in particular. The European federalists sitting together in Hertenstein were aware of ~~the threat that~~ Europe ~~would become an object~~ of history, after being its subject ~~since~~ more than a millennium – an object ~~of~~ decisions taken elsewhere~~,~~ in Washington and Moscow~~, but~~ no longer in Paris, Berlin, Rome or even London. The second dimension of their "Charter" aimed at preserving European independence vis-à-vis those ~~new~~ extra-European "Super-Powers": "The European Union is directed against no-one and renounces any form of power politics. It refuses to be an instrument in the service of any foreign power." (§9) The Hertenstein group could not address the emerging Cold War, which seemed ~~to be not yet~~ unavoidable~~, in September 1946,~~ they refused to be obliged to ~~choose either the one or the other camp~~ – they wanted Europe to escape from such ~~a~~ choice, fr~~o~~m being divided into two spheres of influence, ~~from~~ being split by an "Iron Curtain" – Winston Churchill had already coined ~~that~~ term in March the same year[iii]. In the eyes of the Hertenstein federalists, Europe had only one chance to withstand the overwhelming weight and hegemonial pressure of both Super-Powers: to unite. The individual states of Europe were far too weak to defend themselves against Soviet hegemony, or even the much leaner American one – only ~~together had the Europeans the~~ chance to ~~grant their~~ independence~~, and their~~ diversity ~~indeed~~, ~~their~~ various cultural, political, social identities: "Only the European Union can ensure to all its peoples, small and great, their territorial integrity and the preservation of their own character." (§11)

The relationship between the internal and the external dimension of ~~this~~ federal project for Europe is crucial: Unity is not an aim in itself, it is a means to grant diversity. Unity and diversity are not contradictory, but complementary, mutually reinforcing ~~each other~~. There is a widespread fundamental misunderstanding of federalism~~, either~~ as a way of splitting up an existing united (national) community (as in the French tradition of political thought), or ~~of~~ aiming at a centralized "Super State" (as in the United Kingdom, or, more recently, in Central European countries). Both misunderstand the relationship between unity and diversity – the Hertenstein group got it right: Without federal unity, the Europeans would not be able to preserve their diversity~~,~~ in the face of such powerful homogenizing forces ~~like~~ the USSR and USA.