

For a United States of Europe!

Since the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union at the end of June, a discussion has been unfolding regarding the direction which this project should take. Regardless that such change only ever occurs after the fact — in this case, the belief that the EU needs reform was only publicly acknowledged by those in power after the UK referendum, although this has surely been apparent for a long time — the content of these discussions is both interesting and promising. And despite the divide which is slowly etching its way through public and private spheres alike, severing the propagators of an ‘ever closer union’ from those who wish to regress, politically speaking, to the smallest functional (national) unit, there is something distinctly opportunistic about the current societal ethos.

Unfortunately, the progress of the former, that is of those attempting to unite the countries of the EU on a political basis, is stalling; obstructed by the populist phenomenon that has led to the birth of, or else must be the result of, a new era: ‘postfactualism’ (which is unfortunately more commonly referred to as ‘post-truth’). This is a climate no longer shaped predominantly by facts; a climate in which opinions and interpretations are no longer anchored to a relatively close, factual proximity. Rather, it is a climate in which emotionalised arguments cloud their falsity; in which whole elections hinge on a single topic, ignoring many others in the process. It is, in other words, the situation of a bully on the playground, who get their way not because they are right, but because they can shout louder, or are physically stronger, or, at the very least, have managed to discredit the opposing side.

Yet merely positing a link between postfactualism and the desire to regress does little to help our understanding of this phenomenon. It is necessary to eschew blind acceptance and dig a little deeper, thereby asking ourselves the following: where did this movement come from? Why is the support for this phenomenon far greater on the outskirts of and beyond urbanised centres; culturally rich cities which have become almost irreplaceable as the playground for liberal indulgences. Varying explanations for this are in circulation; some realistic, others a little more far-fetched. But there is a relatively stable common denominator: a sense of exclusion by the hegemony of liberal elitism, which has taken power and refuses to let go of it — ‘changes’ of power from a centre-right to centre-left government, or likewise a rearrangement of a ruling coalition, thereby correctly excluded.

Emerging from all of this, and whilst keeping the aforementioned in mind: how can this phenomenon be countered? How can the wish to regress be subdued, and thus the desire for

more unity increased? Or to address the issue directly: what do people have against the evolution towards a United States of Europe (USE)?

One of the first arguments which opponents of an 'ever closer union' make is fuelled by fear: the fear that this would mean sacrificing long-held traditions, to which there is often a strong emotional attachment. But this is unfounded. A USE's aim would be to move away from political and economic nationalism, whilst maintaining cultural diversity and, perhaps more importantly, independence. The idea is to adapt a system already in place in certain nations: a two-tier hierarchy which differentiates between federal (european) and state (national) law. Political and economic policies, in addition to all other policies (including matters of culture), would then be assigned to these respectively, and accordingly.

A second concern frequently raised in opposition to the EU is the disparity of wealth amongst member states, which far from ensures universal standards of living. Rather, citizens find their quality of life largely dependent on their nationality. The gulf in standards stretches all the way from unemployment and tax rates to student fees and the minimum wage. Consequentially, those member states whose citizens have drawn the shorter straw (geographically speaking often classified as southern Europe, in contrast to the wealthier north) are voicing concern and, increasingly, opposition. This reaction is understandable. But herein lies the key: the solution to this lies not in regression; it is to be found, instead, in a USE. As a politically unified entity, each nation (state) would no longer be solely responsible for itself, but thereafter be one piece of a bigger picture — subject to a common federal law. It follows that certain measures could then be taken to counter the aforementioned gulf in standards. Specifically, the idea is to implement a 'Länderfinanzausgleich' policy already in place in Germany. This seeks to redistribute funds from wealthier to poorer states, in an effort to ensure and overall equality of opportunity (and much more) between citizens of these states.

Thirdly, a USE offers advantages on its own merit. Through an expansion of the union to political spheres, the ability to solve problems transcending national borders is greatly increased: tax evasion, climate change, and finding a sustainable solution to the mass influx of migrants, to name just three.

Finally, and thereby coming full circle: it is clear that the evolution towards a USE would in itself require, as a prerequisite for any functioning system, drastic reform. The (in part) rightful critique of the technocrats in Brussels, whose dubious decisions are often made under the false pretence of democracy, will become obsolete — as the regressionists' legitimate concerns would be addressed by the very nature of progressing towards a USE. Besides all of the aforementioned advantages,

an 'ever closer union' could serve to appease those who feel they have been left behind by the hegemony of liberal elitism; restoring their faith in factual politics in the process.

One last thought: in light of recent developments there is one more, perhaps in the current political climate most important of advantages to be found in a USE: as one supranational, federal state, the USE would have real power on the global stage, and thereafter the ability to ensure stability as the vacuum left by the USA becomes increasingly uncontrollable.