

# Federalism, Functionalism and the EU: The Visions of Mitrany, Monnet and Spinelli

Written by Albert Hayrapetyan

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ALBERT HAYRAPETYAN, SEP 21 2020

IR theories come in rival dyads – realism-liberalism, neo-functionalism-liberal intergovernmentalism (LI), functionalism-federalism, etc. Interestingly, in spite of having the same liberal philosophical roots, some of these have different and even rival connotations. Some scholars argue that there have never been debates, let alone great debates. It is further noted that something that is labelled as ‘IR theories’ are simply ‘academic sects that have developed around each of the isms ... put themselves into a box, adopt an ism for life and then continue to specialize in the rituals and codas of these ‘theologies’ (Prichard, 2017, p. 148). To partly address this gap, in this article, I will attempt to juxtapose the competing theoretical narratives of Federalism and Functionalism and showcase the strengths and limitations of both theories on the case of European integration. I will start by defining the controversial terms of ‘federalism’ and ‘federation’ which are usually labelled as ‘f words’ in academic literature. Whereupon, the basic tenets of each of the theories will be illustrated and the theoretical limitations and glitches will be identified. In conclusion, I will demonstrate that Federalism is still a viable theoretical approach. Moreover, I will come up with a proposition, which may seem to be a small step in terms of power concentration in Brussels, but a big leap necessary to upgrade from ‘Monnet’s Europe’ to that of Spinelli.

The term ‘federation’ and consequently ‘federalism’ derives from the Latin word *foedus* which means covenant, contract or pact. Such covenants were concluded in ancient Rome between allied states or *foederati*. In the UK, for example, the term is associated with fragmentation and disunity, while in the USA or Germany with unitedness (Burgess, 2003, p. 25). As per usual, there is no consensus in literature regarding the meaning and definition of federalism. Dosenrode, for example, defines federalism as a process, while Elazar refers to it as both process and structure. (Dosenrode, 2010, p.11). Nevertheless, in terms of the end goals, it seems that there is a convention among most of the scholars arguing that federalism leads to federation, i.e. the establishment of a federation. In general, apart from the process/structure debate, the major debate is over the nature of federalism, i.e. whether federalism shall have a normative/prescriptive nature or simply describe the emergence of a federation (Dosenrode, 2010, p.11).

Preston King defined federation as ‘an institutional agreement, taking the form of a sovereign state and distinguished from other states solely by the fact that its central government incorporates regional units in its decision procedure on some constitutionally entrenched basis’ (King, 1982, p. 20). Hence, if one views federalism as a process, it is completely possible to have federalism without federation, however vice versa is not imaginable. Therefore, application of the theory of Federalism to European integration does not imply that the EU is deemed as a federation even though some might argue otherwise. Brugges, for instance cited Moravcsik who described the EU as ‘an exceptionally weak federation’ (Brugges, 2003, p. 34). On the other hand, scholars like Burgess contend that the EU ‘represents a new kind of federal order’ and therefore, as I mentioned above, the theory shall be addressed in juxtaposition with its ‘rivals’, and the inherent glitches shall be identified. But prior to that, it is important to state the difference between a confederation and a federation.

In short, a confederation is a union of states, while a federation is that of people and as Burgess put it, — ‘suggesting the unity of one nation or people’ (Brugges, 2003, p. 29). Kolowski believes that the EU has moved beyond federation, but will never become a federation akin to the USA. Nevertheless, he argued that the EU legal system

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shares many characteristics with present-day federations (Koslowski, 1999, p. 563). Admittedly, the boundaries between federation and confederation are blurred, though precise enough to distinguish one from the other based on historical precedent.

Unlike neo-realists, liberal-federalists prioritize identity-related factors as a prerequisite for the formation of federations. They argue that without strong factors such as language, race, religion and nationality the desirable union will not be formed, however community of race, language, religion and nationality would produce a capacity for union (Dosenrode, 2010, p. 13). On the other hand, Wheare, for instance, stated that 'It is clear that, strong as these forces of language, race, religion and nationality are in producing a desire for union [...] it has proven possible none the less to produce a desire for union among peoples who differ in all these important particulars' (Wheare, 1963, p. 44). The existence of modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to prove Wheare's aforesaid words. Moreover, in the USA among the mentioned gluing factors only language exists, though not equally well spoken ubiquitously throughout the fifty states either. Hence, it will be difficult to argue that the federalization of the EU will never be completed solely predicating the argument upon the mentioned factors. Moreover, one has to take into consideration that identities are variable and might be reinvented constantly.

Federalism, in the EU context is understood as the 'application of federal principles to the process of European integration' (Bruggess, 2003, p. 34). In that sense, Burgess discerns two different visions of federalism – Monnet's vision and Spinelli's vision. In short, the difference is that in Monnet's vision, the ultimate goal of political integration is implicit and he would try to realize it through step-by-step integration, unlike Spinelli who would wish to see a federalised EU as soon as possible. He further notes that since its formation, the EU has gone towards a federation substantiating his argument inter alia by the extension of Qualified Majority Voting, the direct election of the European parliament and the empowerment of the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) (Bruggess, 2003, pp. 36-40). As for the enlargement, he does not find it a menace to the end goal of federation stating that it will be counterbalanced with the preservation of *acquis communautaire*, rules of European Monetary Union and the fiscal disciplines (Bruggess, 2003, p. 40).

Overall, he argued that the EU reached 'Monnet's Europe' and the time has ripened for 'Spinelli's Europe'. He concluded that the intergovernmental conferences will soon become obsolete as EU constitutionalization (the chapter was written before the 2005 constitutional referendum results) will bring the union closer to federation (Bruggess, 2003, pp. 41-42). As it turned out, his predictions did not turn into reality. Nevertheless, the constant deepening of European integration laid a solid foundation for the Theory of Federalism not to lose ground to the competing rivals in entirety.

David Mitrany, the founder of functionalism, was both antagonistic and sceptic of any federalization of the Old Continent. Already in his student years he warned that the regional unions are likely to be closed unions, thus further strengthening the dividing lines in the world (Mitrany, 1965, p.124). The need of adjustment, and especially the need for creating cultural and spiritual harmony, the need to bring different nations and cultures together will leave no room to tackle the global tasks (Mitrany, 1965, p.127). Consequently, it will create further incentives for the implementation of the commandments of mercantilist theorists who adamantly advocated for protectionism. This, he contended, will 'shrink Europe back within the narrow comforts of her own walls'. He further argued that the League of Nations failed because it was quintessentially a regional project (Mitrany, 1965, p.125).

Mitrany was also sceptical about the prospect of federalization of Europe or as it is sometimes labelled 'The United States of Europe'. He argued that the previous federations such as the USA or Canada were formed in different historical contexts. He was even sceptical about vesting more power in supranational entities stating that 'the wider and vaguer the range of its activity, the less is the likelihood that a technical organization would be given a freedom of supranational autonomy' (Mitrany, 1965, p.141). Furthermore, he believed that federations are quite shaky systems as 'any addition to the central function alters the balance with cumulative and permanent effect' (Mitrany, 1965, p.141). He also brought up the issue of competing historical narratives of European states. In particular, he stated that neither regional, nor international government can effectively function and sustain without regional and international community, respectively. This seems to be in line with one of the Eurosceptic arguments that 'the history of European integration has hitherto been a history without society' (Leconte, 2015, 253). As for the further

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enlargement, Mitrany does not share the optimism of the federalists arguing that 'any addition to membership would cloud the prospect of political union still further' (Mitrany, 1971, p. 535). He believed that the concept of the state whether unitary or federative does not meet the demands of vehemently developing science, social surge and political upheaval and new solutions are needed (Mitrany, 1971, p. 532). As an alternative, he suggests the functional approach, the quintessence of which is the diversity of new organizations with specific needs and tasks akin to the specialised agencies of the United Nations (UN). According to Mitrany, it emanates, first of all, from the interests of the small states as they will not be dominated (Mitrany, 1965, p. 135-139).

In addition, Mitrany tried to substantiate the democratic legitimacy of his model of integration. He stated that the functional approach is democratic enough as all the specialised agencies of the UN have functional assemblies at the same time highlighting the key role of (international) NGOs (Mitrany, 1965, p. 139-140). Furthermore, supranational structures, according to him, mirror the national structure and become an extension thereof. He brought the example from his own country – the UK, where the nationalised public industries and services were exempted from the parliamentary control (Mitrany, 1965, p.139). Last but not least, it shall be stated that in case of functional integration entering and leaving the 'club' is much easier unlike the supranational integration.

Before identifying the deficiencies and limitations of Federalism and Functionalism, let us showcase the commonalities. One has to mention that both Functionalism and Federalism have the same philosophical roots – liberalism. Both schools assume that there is a sheer mismatch between the territorial scale of human problems and the political authority which generates pressures for jurisdictional reform (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 3). In other words, they agree that the human desiderata for goods can be satisfied by transcending the boundaries of the nation states. The disagreement is about how to transcend those boundaries and what kind of entity shall be created. Moreover, both approaches, unlike Realism, Liberal-intergovernmentalism (LI) and partially neo-functionalism failed to consider and address the interest of key stakeholders such as multinational corporations, the elites and rank-and-file officials of the supranational entities, lobbying groups, political parties, etc. making their arguments and conclusions vulnerable to criticism. Realists, for example, focus predominantly on the considerations of the heads of states. Moravcsik, the founder of LI with his sophisticated methodological prowess, pays due attention to the domestic interests of the governments while neo-functionalists stress the capabilities of the supranational entity (secretariat) and highlight the effect of spillover, i.e. deepening of the integration in one domain necessitates closer integration in another one (s).

Therefore, one may imply that for Moravcsik, for instance, the potency of states' domestic considerations considerably outweighs the might of the supranational players. On the other hand, while reading federalists or functionalists like Burgess, King, the texts of Spinelli or the articles of Mitrany, it is unclear whose interests do they contemplate or whose capabilities do they focus upon. It remains unclear why shall states choose a functional alternative to regional integration. Mitrany's texts are prescriptive and out of his own concerns, perceptions and convictions. He does not put himself in the shoes of the statesmen and the plethora of limitations and obstacles that she has to duly consider.

The deepening integration of the EU, coupled with its widening as well as federalist movements throughout the union, inspired federalists to believe that the EU is heading towards federation. Nevertheless, one shall remember that the most benign time for federalization of the continent was post-WWII time period, when the European elite was keen to unite efforts to evade any future destructive war. As Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU and the first Head of the High Authority of the ESCS truly noticed: 'people only accept change when they are faced with necessity and only recognize necessity when the crisis is upon them' (Dinan, 2010, p.12). The federalist ideas articulated in the Ventotene Manifesto remain on paper until this day hitherto. Moreover, one can assume that the major factor behind the defeat of the Constitutional referendum in France and the Netherlands was the word 'constitution' itself as an association with federalism, since the Lisbon Treaty that was ratified a few years after the rejection of the Constitution is not quintessentially different from the Constitution. Notably, Burgess himself admits that the so-called 'f' word remains very sensitive in the political discourse (Burgess, 2003, 41).

As for Britain's leaving the EU (Brexit), the federalists will look at it as an opportunity, as the 'troublesome guy' is no longer around the table, while the critics will showcase it to further castigate any federalist perspectives. In addition,

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the arguments of the federalists will be much more robust were they predicated upon any empirical evidence. For instance, the 2017 Eurobarometer report on the 'future of Europe' clearly showed that in 28 EU member states only 18% of the respondents supported economic government for the EU, 13% supported common army and 12% the introduction of Euro in all the member states (EU Commission, 2017, p.127). Based on this those perceptions, the opponents of federalists will have a point to argue that the future of European integration, though nebulous enough, is most probably not a federation. Below we will show the limitation of and inherent glitches in Federalism and Functionalism.

To solidify their positions vis-à-vis competing academic cohorts and to make their points more persuasive, federalists shall not merely hide themselves behind historical evidence, but also apply rigorous methodology, both quantitative and qualitative. Therefore, it is surprising that Mitrany willy-nilly gives credit to Federalists for their allegedly sophisticated methodology. In particular, he claimed that the sophisticated methodology does not contribute to 'uncover a vital relation of things on how world society might move in social and political organization' and adds that sometimes more scientific means less relevant (Mitrany, 1971, p. 542). One shall also realize that the times are over, when people like Monnet, Spaak, Adenauer, De Gaulle, Hallstein and other highly-ranked statesmen were the only ones to decide the fate of the future of the European integration. In order for European integration to advance further, both elites and demoi should be enthusiastic about it.

Mitrany's functional approach is overly bureaucratic and will definitely cause coordination issues. Beyond any doubt, institutions of the EU are working much efficiently and effectively than those of Mitrany's 'beloved' UN. As Björn and Söderbaum stated: 'there is an increasing gap between legality and legitimacy in multilateralism and that the UN cannot deliver a legitimate world order on its own. Regional arrangements closer to home can in this view counter perceptions of "external imposition" by a distant global UN.' (Björn, and Fredrik Söderbaum, 2006, p.229). Furthermore, the UN lacks an ECJ-wise Court that would, inter alia, protect the rights of natural and legal persons. In addition, Mitrany's prediction regarding the unlikelihood to vest power in supranational bodies turned out to be wrong with the piecemeal empowerment of Commission, Parliament, ECJ and the creation of the European Central Bank (ECB). And finally Mitrany's concern about democratic legitimacy of the supranational entities is at least partially addressed. Nowadays, national Parliaments not only closely cooperate with the EU Parliament, but also vet the compliance of the proposals of the Commission with the principle of subsidiarity (Dinan, 2010, pp. 297-298).

In addition to what was already stated, Mitrany's criticism about inward looking closed regions is difficult to justify. If he finds any old and tested model of statehood as obsolete, why does he care about regional giant states' ability to prevent the even bigger global giant? Furthermore, it is easier to unite 6-7 regions (once they obtain the attributes of states) than say 192 states. On the other hand, in his criticism of the federation as a political structure, he brings the example of India and Pakistan stating that the federation of inimical states will further increase antagonism, thus (deliberately) transgressing from the issue of European integration (Mitrany, 1971, p. 538). In this context, using the argot of the so-called English School theory of IR, one may argue that India and Pakistan form an international system, i.e. they have sufficient contact with each other and sufficient impact on each other's decisions, which is mainly about power politics among states with constrained actions by anarchy (Stivachtis, 2017, p.28). On the contrary, the EU falls under the definition of international society which Bull defined as 'a group of likeminded states [that] conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions' (Bull, 1977, 13).

To conclude, it is more than obvious that despite being thought-provoking, Functionalism is not even obsolescent, but already obsolete. On the one hand, the unity and unitedness of Europe regardless of its status, form, scope, functions and labels proved to be more viable and coherent vis-à-vis the UN-wise functional approach which was advocated by Mitrany a few decades ago. On the other hand, the piecemeal strengthening and deepening of European integration prompts that it is too early to disregard Federalism, which has not yet lost ground despite the currents of criticism regarding its untrue predictions and unrealistic prescriptions. Nevertheless, Mitrany's criticism about the absence of common history shall be duly considered. Siding with Mitrany, I believe that in order to move from Monnet's vision to that of Spinelli, a common history textbook written in a spirit of European unity is a must. Otherwise, even further power concentration in Brussels will not deter possible future constitutional defeats.

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