



Jean Monnet project  
**DAFEUS**  
by COMOS

**COMOS**

# Federalism as a Solution to the Evolution of Centrifugal Forces in Western Societies

DAFEUS Policy paper series  
**How to make the European Union more effective, efficient and democratic**

**Policy paper no. 3**

By Prof Dr Hartmut Marhold  
Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE)

3 April 2020

Last update: 10 June 2020



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of these publications does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## **Abstract**

Today, Western societies, including the European Union, are torn apart by centrifugal forces. Hartmut Marhold argues that federalism can be a solution to hold the European community together.

## **Hartmut Marhold**

Contact: [hartmutmarhold@googlemail.com](mailto:hartmutmarhold@googlemail.com)

Hartmut Marhold is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE) and teaches at the University of Cologne and the Turkish-German University in Istanbul. He is Vice-President of the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) in Berlin. Hartmut Marhold specialises in the history of European Integration and German European politics. He also works on the institutional and constitutional evolution of the European Union and on the issue of federalism. He is an alumnus of the CIFE Master's programme of the year 1980/81 and was DAAD Visiting Lecturer at CIFE from 1986 to 1991. From 2002 till 2013, he served as Director General of CIFE.

## 1. Introduction

The imminent withdrawal of the United Kingdom has once again intensified discussions about the future of the EU. Although there is wide agreement that the EU requires reforms in many areas, the overall direction of its future development remains unclear. In addition, the European Union faces challenges such as increasing populism, tensions in international relations and an increasing fragmentation of the society.

Taking up current developments, the first Policy Lab on “Making the EU more effective, efficient and democratic. Crisis Management, Democracy and Differentiation in the European Union”, which took place at the Université de Montréal from 30 to 31 October 2018, analyzed how democracy and decision-making in the EU can be improved.

## 2. Centrifugal Forces and Western Societies

Today, Western Societies are torn apart by centrifugal forces. One can observe that individual freedom is pushed to its extreme, to its isolated form of egoism, dissociated from its correlative value: responsibility.

(1) This is the diagnosis on an individual, personal level, as much as on a group level, from ever more split trade unions, to the proliferation of sectoral political parties, e.g.

(2) It is the diagnosis at the social-economic level: inequality is tremendously increasing, spreading, dividing societies into an ever smaller group of super-rich, and an ever bigger group of “working poor”, tearing apart the middle classes, the heart of the society, increasing threats and fears, mistrust, envy, and hate.

(3) It is a phenomenon, too, at the political level, with nations and states: Incarnated not only by Orban and Kaczinsky, by le Pen and “AfD”, not only by Putin and Erdogan, but also by Trump and Modi – and many others: “Me (America ...) first” means in fact “me only”.

(4) It has a huge impact on International Relations: Instead of multilateralism there is an increasing form of unilateralism. This egoism at the state level puts into question international organisations (UNESCO), international agreements (Paris Climate Accord), international trade (protectionism).

(5) Centrifugal forces are at work for technological reasons, too: with tools like cell-phones, virtual reality gadgets of all kinds, the construction of reality is an individual affaire, “constructivism” is no longer “social”, but becomes “individual” constructivism (but submits the individual to manipulation by those who shape the gadgets and intrude their perceptions, like unperceived medicaments or drugs).

(6) The individualisation of information, constructing perceptions, communication, virtual worlds

- puts “truth” at the mercy of individuals, suggesting that every claim to truth is equally worth-while, disregarding of whether it is solidly founded or purely illusionary;
- makes communication anonymous, dissociates individual responsibility for what one says and writes from the author, suppresses psychological barriers, which in physical, personal, direct communication would prevent individuals from being aggressive, condescending, arrogant, hateful;
- leads to fake news, mistrust, empties commonly recognised facts, makes argument obsolete.

On the other hand, these forces are acting on a global scale, binding the whole of humanity into an interdependent ensemble. Globalisation meets with the spread of these centrifugal forces, an encounter, which promises a mess of anarchical conflicts.

### **3. The European Union as a victim of these evolutions**

An integrative project aiming at an “ever closer Union”, or at least at a federal Union, relying on a consensus provided by a “federal spirit” (Burgess) meets with centrifugal forces at all levels: cultural, technological, social, economic, and political. European integration and the mood of the time are incompatible with each other. For example, Brexit is as much a phenomenon of centrifugal forces as Catalonia’s separatism, as well as the lack of commitment to common law (and other common decisions).

### **4. Federalism can provide solutions**

Federalism is a balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces, a constant negotiation over the right share of common and individual, integrative and disintegrative forces, it binds individuals (at the personal as well as the community, associative, social level) into a community of shared destiny, without obliging them to give up their different individualities, their peculiarities, their particular identities.

On the contrary, well understood, federal systems provide room and grant secure spaces for being and staying different within a community, a Union, a Federation. Thus, federalism could hold us back from staggering into an anarchical mess at a global scale, with undomesticated centrifugal forces engaging in hateful violent conflicts with each other.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

Lifetime: September 2018 – February 2021

Organisation: Cologne Monnet Association for EU-Studies COMOS ([www.comos-cologne.eu](http://www.comos-cologne.eu))

The DAFEUS project has four objectives. It enhances the debate on the future development of the EU, fosters public knowledge and awareness of EU politics, promotes EU studies in new research areas, and strengthens the exchange between both academics and practitioners as well as civil society and the general public.

By comparing the EU to federally organised countries, the project will shed new light on strengths and deficits of the EU's political system. On this basis, DAFEUS develops concrete recommendations how to make the EU and its federal elements more effective, more efficient and more democratic.

DAFEUS will focus on three key topics:

- 1) Institutions and decision-making in federal systems
- 2) Democracy in federal systems
- 3) Differentiation in federal systems

DAFEUS combines academic research, public outreach and policy dialogue by organising three DAFEUS weeks, each of which includes a policy lab and an annual conference. The events will bring together senior and junior experts with diverse academic and professional backgrounds, policy-makers, civil society organisations and the wider public.

The project's output will comprise a set of webcasts, including expert interviews and speeches, three background papers on the project's key topics, three policy papers with recommendations from the policy labs, three conference reports with key results, a journal article and an edited volume gathering contributors to the project's events. A state-of-the-art website and a corresponding online platform for debate via Facebook complement DAFEUS' outreach activities.

DAFEUS is implemented by the Cologne Monnet Association for EU Studies (COMOS) in cooperation with the Université de Montréal, the Centre international de formation européenne and the University of Cologne.

## **Imprint**

Coelner Monnet Vereinigung für EU-Studien e.V. (COMOS)  
c/o Centre for Turkey and EU Studies (CETEUS)/University of Cologne  
Gottfried-Keller-Str. 6  
50931 Cologne, Germany  
Phone: +49 221 470-2852  
Email: [contact @ comos-cologne.eu](mailto:contact@comos-cologne.eu)