



THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE

(A Eurotopia?)

De Amsterdamse Stichting voor de Historische Wetenschap

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Some years ago I had the pleasure of meeting the famous British historian Prof. Cyril Northcote Parkinson. On that occasion he told me about his ideas concerning a Federated Europe. Professor Parkinson had his doubts about one united Europe consisting of the present nations, since these nations would be of entirely different size, population and economic importance. He therefore favoured splitting up these existing nations into much smaller states of equal size and importance, which could thus form a more balanced federal unity.

I was fascinated by his original thoughts, although at the time I wondered how "utopian" his ideas were and if and how they could be implemented. However, now that European unity seems to have become a reality, the problem of the dissimilarity of the members of the European Community remains a difficult issue. I do realize that before and after Parkinson others have written about the same subject. I also realize however that nothing has ever come of these ideas.

At the present time, June 1992, after Maastricht and Oporto we see that the progress towards a United Europe has been enormous. At the same time we also see the breaking up of existing nations, the situation in Yugoslavia being the most recent and very sad example.

Even if a United Europe is firmly established, there will be the problem of governing it. It seems to me that governing a continent with more than 350 million inhabitants is an impossible task. Decentralisation must be the answer. As you will read on the following pages I propose a United Europe of 75 states, each with a population of five to ten million inhabitants.

There is no doubt that humans want to live in a "territory" that they can oversee and where they feel at home. When I lived in the United States during the late 1940's, I was surprised to experience that what we Europeans call the "United States" is in reality a true federation of states, where the state government has a much greater influence on day-to-day matters than most Europeans imagine. This creates a situation where, should one ask an American where he comes from, he will rarely answer "the United States", but nearly always "Texas.., Kentucky.., Rhode Island..", or whichever state he may live in. Chauvinism seems to be a natural instinct, which cannot be eliminated, but can be limited to a much safer enthusiasm for the state football team etc.

Of course even in the United States not everything is perfect nor perfectly organised, but the fact remains that none of the 50 American States have fought each other since the American Civil War, whilst in that period Europe went through three major wars.

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It is understandable that many people's initial reaction to the following proposal for a Federal Europe will be one of amazement and cynicism. Still, even if many people look upon federalisation as "Eurotopia", I would like to invite them to have a second look at this proposal. Obviously the plan is far from ideal and does not offer solutions to every problem, but it can be adapted and adjusted according to actuality. Let us in this context not forget that our present nations are also artificial and, in many cases, quite recent inventions. Government and cultural elites may have made us think otherwise, but let us remember that their line of thinking is embedded in (accepted) chauvinistic nationalism. The present set up of nations is in many ways just as arbitrary as my ideas may seem. Not only in Yugoslavia do we see movements for independence, but also in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Catalanian regions, the Basque country, Middle Europe and so on. It may however be necessary to preserve the actual "nations" for a limited period of time, whilst the governmental powers are transferred to individual states.

(A further example is in the newly created C.I.S., where similar solutions as I have described could be adopted. At this stage the difference in size and number of inhabitants between Russia (over 145 million) and Georgia (approx. 5,5 million) for instance will not result in a balanced United States of what was once the Soviet Union).

In formulating these proposals I received the kind support of Prof. Dr. H.L. Wesseling, professor of General History of the University of Leiden, Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Director of the Institute for the History of European Expansion, as well as the support of H.W. van den Doel of the History Department of the University of Leiden. I would like to thank them both for their valued assistance.

Finally, let me emphasize once more that I hope this proposal will stimulate people to think about their future, and will hopefully provide them the insight to understanding that the present European structure is not the right course for the future. Breaking up old designs in order to create a better future is a very positive action. As they say: you have to break eggs to make an omelette and I hope the "omelette" I hereby present, "Eurotopia", is a step forward towards a better future.

A.H. Heineken

1992 is supposed to be a magical year for Europe, the year in which decisive steps are taken towards European unity. Yet it seems that the process of unification in Western Europe is faltering, due to the bureaucratic problems of European institutions and of domestic pressures on local governments. Meanwhile, in Central and Eastern Europe, the forces of nationalism and chauvinism are reemerging and threatening peace and stability in that part of the world.

Second thoughts on Europe

"I believe in the virtue of small nations" (André Gide)

C. Northcote Parkinson observed in 1970 that the rulers and the ruled had already drifted dangerously apart, and that because of the sheer size and complexity of the institutions which rule the world, the political bureaucracies seem to be beyond our power to influence them.¹ To show that there were exceptions, Parkinson suggested awarding a "Parkinson Prize" to the best governed country. He concluded by a number of criteria, such as public safety, public health, the number of bureaucrats, the number of strikes, the prosperity and economic outlook (in 1970), that "the Government of the Netherlands should be awarded the Parkinson Prize". Finland was highly commended. Parkinson suspected that there might be grounds for believing that units of a relatively small size, like the Netherlands, are more efficient in the nature of things. For him this was a "useful conclusion in itself".

In another essay Parkinson elaborated further on this theme. He explained that there were some efficient nation-states, like Finland, Denmark or Sweden, and that these were "of merely provincial size with populations of about four to seven million". He went on to say that, "where the population exceeds ten million, there is a manifest case for decentralisation". We have begun to realize that a state of thirty to fifty million people is hopelessly incompetent, with a deadening effect on provincial culture and a drearily standardizing effect on social life. For all purposes of internal administration we want a government, which is accessible and economical, administering an area which is culturally unified and reasonably small. In Parkinson's opinion, the corollary of a European unity should be a new emphasis on provincial autonomy.

¹Northcote Parkinson 'The Law of Delay' (London, 1970)

A few years before Parkinson came up with these ideas, the Austrian sociologist Rudolf Kohr expressed similar thoughts in his book "The Breakdown of Nations", published in 1957.² According to Kohr, "it is always bigness, and only bigness, which is the problem of existence, social as well as physical", and that "the only solution must lie in the cutting down of the substances and organisms which have outgrown their natural limits". A new division of Europe would bring the continent back to its more natural state, in which every group would be free to keep its own identity. Europe would also become a much safer place. European wars in the past were mainly fought for the establishment or preservation of unity and the acquisition of border territories. The re-establishment of small-state sovereignty would thus not only satisfy the undying desire of these later territories for the restoration of their autonomy; it would also eliminate the cause of the wars as if by magic. For example, there would no longer be a question of whether disputed Alsace should be united with France or Germany. With neither a France nor a Germany left to claim it, it would be Alsatian. Possible wars between the new small-states are furthermore easily checked by the larger states and, if they were to occur, their scale would render them quite harmless.

Along the lines of the theories of Parkinson and Kohr, a new proposal is made here for a new administrative division of Europe. At first sight, it may seem to be a little "utopian" to divide Europe into seventy-five new states, but a closer look will show that the scheme is not that unrealistic.

First of all, one should realize that the present nation-states are rather artificial and relatively new inventions. For instance, a German or an Italian state never existed before the second half of the nineteenth century. People from the south of Germany are still hardly able to understand their "low-countrymen" from the north of Schleswig-Holstein. Even in a small and relatively ancient state like Spain, many people from Catalonia for instance, do not consider themselves in the first place to be Spanish. At the time of the French Revolution, when the French got their "Marseillaise", the majority

of the population did not even speak French and were not able to sing the national anthem. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that, as the American historian Eugen Weber has shown, the "peasants" were made into "Frenchmen". The nation-states are quite often inventions of intellectual elites, propagated on the people concerned through education and the media; During this process traditions and "national heritages" are created.

The second reason why the scheme is fully workable, is the fact that the new division of Europe is based on presently existing administrative units, like the federal states of Germany, the counties of Great Britain, the provinces of the Netherlands and the regions of France. Therefore, the necessity to create entirely new administrative bodies to rule the new states does not exist. Present administrations can take up the tasks of the new governments instantly.

Thirdly, it is quite clear that in the present European society forces are already working to create smaller states. In almost every European state there exists a drive towards decentralisation, or even towards independence, as for instance in Great Britain, Yugoslavia and Spain (to mention a few rather different phenomena). It may be wiser to accept these developments than to work against them.

Finally, the proposed scheme avoids the mistakes of the past. In the new Europe it would be impossible for one nation to dominate other countries in the way, for instance, that Russia dominated the former Soviet Union or the way Prussia ruled over the Germany of Bismarck. This "mistake of Bismarck", repeated by the Soviet leadership in their country, ultimately led to the destruction of the federations concerned.

Under this scheme, every new country would be of similar size, most of them with between five and ten million inhabitants, as Parkinson suggested. To make each region exactly the same size would not be possible, because of the historical and administrative heritage of the old Europe. Thus, Iceland simply remains a state with its

² Rudolf Kohr "The Breakdown of Nations" (London, 1957)

existing 252,000 inhabitants, while Ile-de France (Paris included) would have over 10,000,000 inhabitants.

There are two exceptions to this scheme: Monaco and Liechtenstein. These small principalities will be non-voting member-states of the new Europe, not unlike the District of Columbia in the United States.

However, the division of Europe is not the ultimate goal of the scheme. The seventy-five new states should form a European Federation, in which the federal authorities will be responsible for foreign affairs, defence, the monetary system, basic social services and transfer of wealth between the richer and poorer states of the new United States of Europe. In the federal governmental bodies, every member-state will have an equal say; a senate, in which the "governors" of the states will have a seat, will be established along with a directly elected house of representatives. Present institutions, such as the European Court of Justice, can of course carry on their tasks. A constitution, based on the successful American system, could serve as an example for the way a federal Europe would be ruled.

There are of course a number of problems still to be solved. For instance, what would be the task of the royal families in the new Europe? Perhaps they can become sovereigns of the new states. There is even scope to reassign some royal families presently without a formal role to be heads of newly formed regions. Indeed some of the seventy-five new states would like to have a royal head of state; we only have to think of Hannover, Burgundy or Navarra-Aragon. The capital of the federal Europe has to be chosen. Candidates are obviously Strasbourg and Brussels, but it might be a better idea to split the federal institutions over several important towns. Brussels or Strasbourg could thus become the political capital, Frankfurt or London the financial capital. The European Court of Justice could stay in Luxembourg, while certain ministries could be situated in different cities. A serious contender to become the cultural capital

would obviously be Paris, which has the largest number of ancient and avant-garde cultural institutions compared to other major cities.

Finally, there might be some difference of opinion with regard to the way Europe should precisely be divided under this plan. Should there for instance be a united Portugal? Should Sardinia and Sicily be one state? And is it not better to divide Baden and Württemberg? However, these questions are details, which can be worked out at a later date, once the basic principles of this scheme have been accepted by the existing European population.

The advantages of dividing Europe into seventy-five states are obvious, and already partly acknowledged by Parkinson and Kohr. The people of Europe would be better able to control their governments. The governments would be able to rule more efficiently, no longer needing large bureaucracies. It is of course essential that when the plan is implemented, the total number of bureaucrats in Europe does not rise. This should not be difficult to establish: smaller states make it possible to have more efficient governments, while a number of federal institutions already exist. Defence spending can be substantially lower than it is today. European wars would be something of the past, so a smaller police force for internal problems and a modern rapid deployment-force for crises around the world would suffice.

In the new Europe there will be less "frustrated" people. Although chauvinism will always remain, the fanatical nationalistic groups which are presently committing terrorist attacks, will have no reason to exist anymore. Chauvinism will only be a part of the emotions in the sporting-arenas, where sportsmen (and women) will represent their regions, i.e. states. Europeans will be able to identify more clearly with a certain region, giving way to one of the basic instincts of mankind: the need to live in a clearly defined territorial unit.