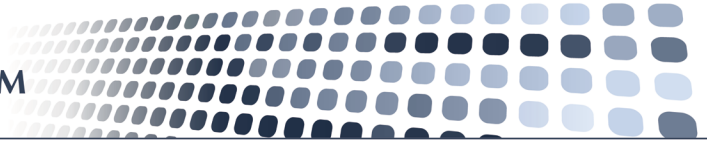




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The Spinelli Group: an engine of the initiatives that Europe needs?

by Roberto Castaldi

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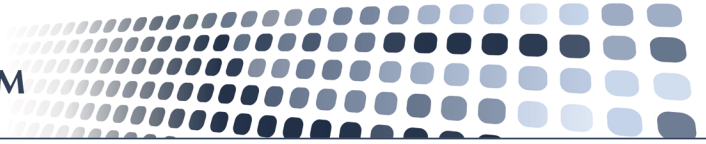


Abstract

This paper analyses the importance of the creation of the Spinelli Group in the current context of the European unification process. If the Spinelli Group manages to take initiatives to advance the ability of the EU to cope with the many challenges it faces, it will provide a great service to the interests of the European Union's citizens.

Key-words:

European Union, Spinelli, Spinelli Group, crisis, initiative, leadership, European economic government



1. Introduction

In the last editorial I suggested that “Europe needs initiative and leadership to overcome the crisis”. In that paper I applied the interpretative scheme “crisis-initiative-leadership” - developed with reference to the European unification process as a whole – to the current crises. The paper concluded that while crises are aplenty, effective initiatives and leaderships are badly lacking in the EU. From this perspective things may be changing. The creation of the Spinelli Group may suggest that new initiatives are indeed likely to be forthcoming.

A group of prominent MEPs from different parties has promoted this network, which includes personalities of civil society with a high profile and a long-standing commitment to the cause of European unity, such as Ulrich Beck, Jacques Delors, Mario Monti, Tommaso Padoa Schioppa and Amartya Sen. The Group is open to ordinary citizens who can sign the Group Manifesto (available at www.spinelligroup.eu) and will be invited to an open meeting at least once a year. The Group’s aims are presented in a clear and straightforward manner:

‘As indicated in the manifesto, at a time of interdependence and a globalised world, clinging to national sovereignties and intergovernmentalism is not only warfare against the European spirit, it is but an addiction to political impotence. Today we are moving in the opposite direction, towards a looser instead of a closer Union, towards a more national instead of a post-national Europe.

The aim of the Spinelli Group is to oppose this backward and reactionary direction. We believe that this is not the moment for Europe to slow down, but on the contrary to accelerate. Our goal is a federal and post-national Europe, a Europe of the citizens.

We want to make a network of those who choose the European interest above their national interest, those who want to push the federal project in their respective environments. Just like Altiero Spinelli did, we want to operate from the European Parliament, but not only from the European Parliament. The aim of the Spinelli Group is to become a network of citizens, politicians, academics and writers who are convinced it is time for Europe to move forward.’

And the Group has identified some principal paths of action to pursue its goals:



‘The Spinelli Group will come forward with suggestions it considers as the necessary next Big Steps Forward. There are a lot of themes and subjects on which the European Union should move forward but someone must put them on the agenda. Federal and post-national steps forward will be proposed about for example European defence, culture and education, European citizenship or energy.

One tool the MEP Spinelli Group will use is the Written Declaration in the European Parliament. The goal is to find a federal majority on important subjects. The Written Declaration will also be used to make clear what our red lines are on important negotiations. An obvious example in the near future is going to be the negotiations on the Budget 2011, the revision of the current financial perspectives 2007-2013 and the next multi annual financial framework 2013-2020, where the Spinelli Group is not going to accept a shrinking budget.

Once or twice a year all the members of the Spinelli Network Group will be invited to a Spinelli Meeting.

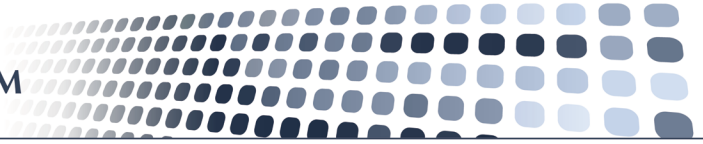
The Spinelli Group will also organise The Shadow Council. Today the European Council is opting for the intergovernmental method. This is of course a consequence of the situation that every Head of State or Prime Minister is defending their own national interest. The Shadow Council will do the opposite and look for solutions based on the interest of the entire European Union and its citizens. It will be a federalist and post-national Council working on European answers to European problems.’

I will try in what follows to describe out the possible implications of the creation of the Spinelli Group, drawing on lessons from the history of European integration that may be relevant to its activity.

2. The potential role of the Spinelli Group

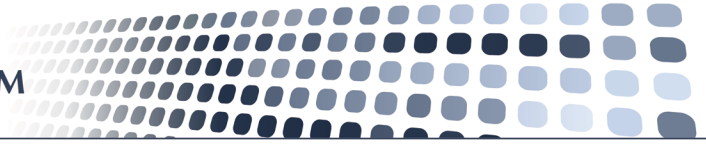
The previous editorial discussed the idea that in the past crises provided occasions for Europe to advance thanks to the initiative of European personalities and organizations who convinced the political leaders that a European solution was required (see Monnet 1976; Spinelli 1979, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Albertini 1961, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1973, 1979, 1980; Castaldi 2005, 2009, 2010). A successful initiative is built on the effectiveness of the proposal to answer a crisis as well on the credibility of the proposers and their ability to gather enough support around it.

The Spinelli Group explicitly wishes to take initiatives on crucial issues. Given its composition, it will certainly have the credibility to do so. Much will depend on its ability to



link its proposals with socially perceived crises, and to create a common front with pro-European organizations around Europe. History suggests that the campaigns of European organizations have tended to be ineffective without a linkage/alliance with a political initiative within the European institutions or national governments, and vice-versa.

For example the role of European and federalist personalities – such as Monnet and Spinelli - and movements – such as the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, the Union of European Federalists and the European Movement – was certainly important with regard to the ECSC, the ECD attempt, Euratom, the direct election of the European Parliament, the creation of the European Council, or the creation of monetary union, even if in other phases or over other issues they failed to play a significant role (see Albertini, 1985 and 1986; Bossuat, 1999 ; Burgess. 1986; Burgess, 1989; Burgess, 1995; Burgess, 2000; Caraffini, 2008; Dastoli and Pierucci 1984; Delors, 2009; Drake, 2000; Duchêne, 1994; Fontaine, 1988 ; Fransen, 2001; Graglia, 2008; Grant, 1994; Hallstein, 1972; Landuyt, Preda (eds), 2000; Levi, Pistone (eds.) 1973; Lodge, 1984; Loth et al., 1998; Malandrino, 2005;Majocchi, 1996; Milési, 1985; Monnet, 1976; Paolini, 1988; Paolini, 1989; Paolini, 1994; Paolini, 1996; Pasquinucci, 2000; Pinder, 1991; Pinder, 1993; Pinder, 1996; Pinder, 1997; Pinder, 1998; Pistone (ed), 1975; Pistone, 1982; Pistone, 1992; Pistone 1996; S. Pistone, 1999; S. Pistone and Malandrino (eds.), 1999; Preda, 1990 and 1994; Ross, 1995; Roussel, 1996; Spinelli 1979, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1992a, 1992b). In all successful cases they managed to create a strong link with one or more national governments or European institutions, often providing an original proposal and/or proof of popular support. This was the case for Monnet’s initiative leading to the Schuman Declaration and the ECSC, and later for his proposal of a European Defence Community – when faced by the Korean war, and the American demand for German rearmament – and for the Euratom Treaty. The same applies to Spinelli’s initiative to accompany the EDC with a European Political Community, based on a popular campaign linked to the political acceptance of the idea by De Gasperi (Preda 2004). Similar considerations apply to the post-1971 crisis, to Monnet’s initiative to create the European Council as a “provisional European government”, and to the federalist campaigns for the direct election of the European Parliament and for monetary integration. Giscard D’Estaing’s and Helmut Schmidt were clearly crucial in this latter phase (Collignon and Schwarzer 2003: ch. 2). The convergence of grass-root activists and of Spinelli’s initiative within the first directed elected Parliament, reinforced by the

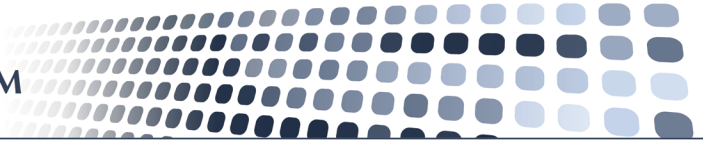


commitment of the Italian government led directly to the convening of an IGC to change the Treaty.

On the other hand, federalist campaigns without any linkage with initiatives within the European institutions and national governments, managed to keep those federalist organizations alive, but failed to reach their goals: from the European People Congress to the European People Voluntary Census. And the same applied to bold initiatives by European institution not linked with pro-European organizations. Spinelli noted that Hallstein's proposals had a substantially federal character, but complained that Hallstein's refusal to link with the pro-European organizations weakened his position vis-à-vis the national governments, and thus contributed to his defeat.

The Spinelli Group's openness to civil society suggests that it may be well-positioned to steer pro-European public opinion into an alliance with the most advanced elements of the European Parliament. At the same time, the very fact that the Group exists indicates the willingness of its proponents to start a federalist political initiative within the Parliament. This may provide some hope about the chances of success for pro-European campaigns that can accompany the Group's political initiatives within the Parliament. Neo-functionalists authors emphasise the role of European institutions to take the initiative, usually focusing on the Commission. History suggests that at different times both the Commission and the Parliament have been able to take the initiatives. And when they acted in the same direction, this was even more effective. However, the Barroso Commission has progressively weakened its ability to take European initiatives, almost becoming a secretariat of the Council. While the Prodi Commission put forward the most advanced proposal during the work of the Convention, the so-called Penelope Project, today it seems that a new initiative is likely to start only from the Parliament.

Since its direct election the Parliament has steadily increased its role and powers, and has proved willing and able to exploit them. The Lisbon Treaty endows the Parliament with a new crucial power: to propose amendments to the Treaties, on which a new Convention can be convened by a simple majority of the European Council. This is the power the Parliament lacked at the time of the adoption of the Treaty of European Union (the so-called Spinelli Project) in 1984. If the Spinelli Group can steer the Parliament into making use of this amendment proposal power, such an initiative in itself would also transform the Convention procedure. The Convention would not have an open mandate, but will have to

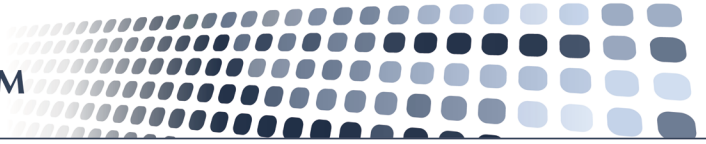


take the EP proposal as its initial working document, rather than those elaborated by the Presidium, as was the case in the last Convention. A bold amendment proposal by the EP would make a new Convention effectively “constitutional” in character. The use of this new power by the EP would once again open up a potential constitutional momentum and would be coherent with Spinelli’s lifelong struggle.

2. The Lisbon Treaty and beyond

The approval of the Lisbon Treaty and its lengthy ratification process brought many governments to consider closed the question of institutional reform for decades to come. The current crisis shows the insufficiency of the Lisbon institutional framework. Several proposals have been put forward to improve the EU economic governance, some of which would require a formal Treaty amendment. The parallel path of exploiting Lisbon to the full and of overcoming Lisbon altogether has thus been undertaken.

The Greek debt crisis and the consequent risks for the Euro-area itself have spurred new proposals from the Commission and the Central Bank, which substantially ignore the Parliament (for an analysis of these documents in this journal see also Castaldi 2010). The European Commission proposal “Reinforcing economic policy coordination” (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Central Bank, the Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions of 12/5/2010) considers coordination as the maximum possible objective. The European Central Bank proposal for “Reinforcing Economic Governance in the Euro Area” asks at least for some broader form of governance in the Eurozone. Many of the ECB proposals were convergent with those of the Commission, but often more detailed and nuanced, for example regarding the enlargement of the range of sanctions that can be used within the Excessive Deficit Procedure. The ECB also proposed to strengthen the Eurogroup role in financial surveillance of member states, to create an independent EU fiscal agency and to provide the Commission with the power to present proposals about sanctions that can be modified only by unanimity within the Council. Overall, the ECB proposals go further than the Commission in empowering Europe to deal with the crisis. However the underlying philosophy is absolutely



technocratic. The Parliament is never mentioned, and there is no recognition of the principle “no taxation without representation”. The idea of an independent fiscal agency and of a stricter European control over national budgets without any involvement of the European Parliament looks democratically inconsistent, and thus hardly practicable. For their part, France and Germany have put forward their proposal to reform the Stability and Growth Pact, a step which would necessarily involved a reform of the Lisbon Treaty as well.

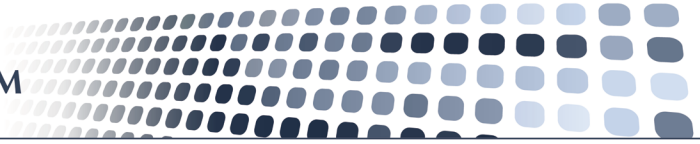
3. A possible “Spinellian” strategy for the Spinelli Group

Monnet was always in favour of concentrating action on a decisive point, which could change the overall context. In his attempt to lead the first directly elected Parliament into taking a constituent initiative, Spinelli demonstrated to the Parliament that its powers were insufficient and that an institutional reform was needed by waging battle on the European budget.

The budget continues to be a crucial issue today and the EP has put on the table the issue of the flexibility of the Budget and of the EU “own resources” in place of the national contributions to make up the budget.

If it keeps these demands as a precondition for its acceptance of the budget – whose increase the Commission did not dare to propose – this can be the start of a qualitatively new phase. As the ECB Governor, Trichet, has declared on several occasions, a federal currency requires a federal budget, for which the Stability Pact is just a surrogate (interview, available at <http://www.ecb.int/press/key/date/2010/html/sp100713.en.html>)

The Stability Pact seeks to ensure that the member states, which in recent years have accumulated significant debts and deficits, keep their national budgets in order. But beside national austerity there is the widely recognized need for the EU to take upon itself the task of development and growth. This should be done by the EU through a reasonable budget, based on own resources, and the creation of Eurobonds. This is nothing new, as the first European Coal and Steel Community had both the possibility to levy taxes on coal and steel, and to borrow on the international market – and it used both powers. *Notre Europe* launched a debate on the budget issue in 2008, starting with a paper by Alfonso



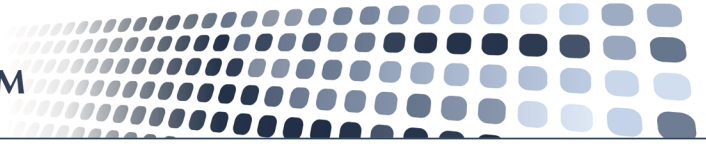
Iozzo, Stefano Micossi and Maria Teresa Salvemini (available at http://www.notre-europe.eu/uploads/tx_publication/Iozzo_Micossi_and_Salvemini_A_New_Budget_for_the_EU_2008.pdf) and has produced several other useful papers on the issue.

To keep a single market and a single currency as they are without establishing a single European economic policy, focusing on research and development, is simply recipe for European decline, as it allows no capacity to boost the overall European economy in face of the current crisis. Although private and public savings in the US are lower than in Europe, the US has been able to launch a plan to sustain growth worth about 5,6% of their GDP. China did even more (7% of GDP), based on its high level of internal savings. Europe's national plans altogether amount only to 1,5% of GDP. This is partly due to the fact that Europe has more robust automatic stabilisers, inherent in its more generous social security provisions compared to other areas of the world. However, the significant difference with the other main economic areas remains striking and disappointing.

But the budget is just one aspect of the European issue, which must be placed in its global context. The world is experiencing a transition to a multipolar order where only continent-wide states can play a role. It is enough to consider the geography and demography of the US, Russia, China, India and Brazil to realize the impossibility for each European nation-state to stand alone. The structural reform of the international monetary system, with all its implications for the creation and distribution of wealth around the world, is on the agenda.

The Bank of China Governor has indicated the goal of a multipolar and multilateral monetary system, based on the use of the Special Drawing Rights of the IMF for international trade and transactions, building on Keynes and Triffin studies (see a series of speeches and short papers delivered by Zhou Xiaochuan, available at <http://www.pbc.gov.cn/english/detail.asp?col=6500&id=178>; see also Mosconi, 2009; and even before the crisis Iozzo, and Mosconi, 2006).

The current reform of the IMF goes in the same direction. It implies a reduction of the European states seats in the IMF board, but it has not triggered the unification at least of the Euro-area representation within the IMF, which would make it the single most important share-holder of the IMF. On the contrary, the current reform is fostering an intra-European parochial fight about which countries should give up their seats. The inability to consider this reform as a chance to strengthen the European role and voice on



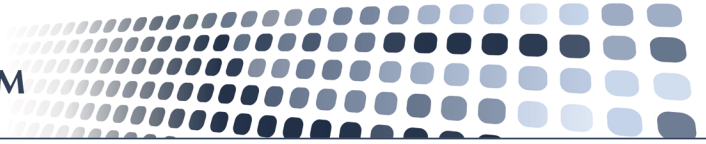
the world stage testifies to the lack of vision and responsibility of current national leaderships in the European Union. Europeans continue to be divided and thus irrelevant on the world scene.

The Euro is the second currency of the world, but Europe is unable to adopt a single representation and policy on this crucial issue, which will contribute significantly to shaping the economic and political balance of power of the future.

Even so, some private initiatives in Europe show that some members of the political and economic elites are conscious of what is at stake (see the program of a seminar organised by the Triffin Foundation, which is available at the following link: http://www.tommasopadoaschioppa.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2010/06/Triffin21_Turin_13-15May2010.pdf).

Europe's weakness is its own fault. It has all the capabilities to be a relevant player across all policy areas. Commissioner Bonino once said that Europe was an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm. This is true about its present capabilities, not about its potential. In 2009 the EU 27 member states together had military expenditures of \$ 260.4 billions, i.e. 1,63 % of GDP and 17% of the world military expenditure. The US spent \$ 663 billions, i.e. 4,3% of GDP (with a 9,9% deficit) and 43% of the world military expenditure. China, Russia, India and Brazil had respectively 6,6%, 3,5%, 2,4% and 1,7% of world military expenditure: taken all together, they made up 14,2% of the world military expenditures, thus less than the European expenditures alone. Europe's irrelevance is not due to its limited spending but to its divided spending. A single European defence could at the same time increase Europe's military capabilities and political relevance, while significantly reducing overall military expenditure in Europe.

At stake is European civilization, not simply Europe's role in the world. Toynbee noticed the "dwarfing of Europe" already in 1948. He recalled that the Greek polis and the Italian city-states of the Renaissance had produced great cultures but then declined and were conquered, when new larger polities consolidated around them. . European nation-states may follow the same fate. Europeans are accustoming themselves to the rhetoric of inevitable decline, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When people, and young people especially, start thinking that their future will certainly and inevitably be worse than the conditions of their parents, the situation is very dangerous. With little hope for the future it is impossible to adopt a long-term view and a purposeful strategy. The tendency



towards the closure of society and the identification of scapegoats, with the emergence of double standards, xenophobia, populism, etc. finds a propitious environment. The inability of the nation-state to cope with the main problems Europe is facing transforms national politics in a mere power-battle. The result is a lack of vision and the emergence of models of elites' behaviour which crystallises negative values, as the Italian case in particular shows. But Berlusconi is just a symptom, certainly not the cause, of a European malaise, which finds in Italy its most visible apex.

The whole values of the European civilization are at stake. A divided Europe cannot avoid declining, and will have difficulty in stopping the regressive tendencies which are already emerging. A federal Europe, combining unity and diversity, would be able to build on Europe's strengths to ensure a better future for Europe and the world. It is a matter of responsibility of our generation with regards to the future generations and the world at large. If completed, the European unification process will create both an international actor and an international example of the possibility for formerly sovereign states to pool and share their sovereignty to face common problems, a process which is required also to cope with the global problems we face as humanity. Europe normatively proposes this process to the world, but then falls into self-contradiction by not completing its own unification process. Only successful example are emulated, and Europe is at the moment only partially successful. It needs to acquire the capacity to act purposefully as a single actor on the global arena, to put forward effectively its peaceful integrative model.

The current world transition to a new order is the time left to Europe to complete its unification and take part in the shaping of the new international system. This requires more power, democracy and efficiency for the EU. The generalised abolition of unanimity within the EU, the application of co-decision between Parliament and Council to all policy areas, the transformation of the Commission into a fully-fledged federal government responsible to the Parliament and the Council, the already mentioned fiscal powers, and the creation of a single European defence structure all these are urgent necessities. The current impasse on the European budget – blocked by only three states – suggests that not all member states are willing and ready to go ahead along the federal path. A vanguard is necessary, just as it was for the establishment of the monetary union.

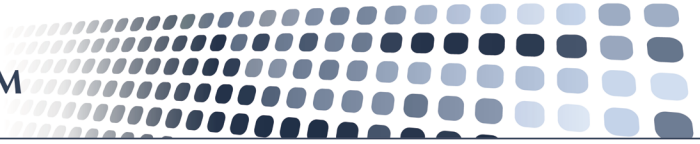
The current situation of a monetary union, not coupled by an economic and political one, is putting the very existence of the Euro and the EU at risk, as President Van



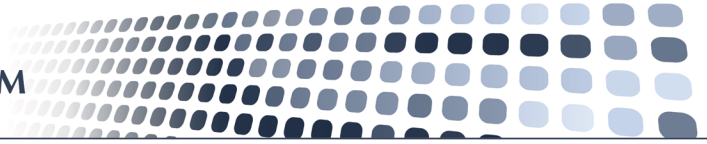
Rampouy observed during the last Eurogroup meeting. If this is the case, the European Parliament, which is the highest expression of European democracy and of the European citizens, should take a bold initiative to propose an overall reform of the EU to complete European political union and save European civilization. To pursue its aim the Spinelli Group will have to provide the initiative and leadership to steer the Parliament in this direction. Good luck!

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