FOR A NEW SCHUMAN DECLARATION
AND A CONSTITUENT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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17 December 2012 – The European Council meeting of 13-14 December in Brussels largely disappointed the expectations built up after the meeting at the end of June 2012: the mandate at that time to the presidents of the European Council, the Commission, the Eurogroup and the ECB to “develop (...) a specific and time-bound road map for the achievement of a genuine Economic and Monetary Union” was an important step in the right direction. Unfortunately, that first step was not followed by the others essential to mark out a credible horizon for escaping the crisis, towards a Federal Union.

The consultation process set in motion by the four presidents had led to important indications and positions being taken by the institutions involved: for instance, the European Parliament Resolution of 20 November 2012 with the “recommendations” to the European Commission, and the subsequent Communication from the same Commission (in the final version) of 30 November 2012 designed to “launching a European Debate” for a “deep and genuine economic and monetary union”.

These documents abound in effective analysis and forward-looking proposals – similar to many indications from Centre for Studies on Federalism – which, only a few years ago, would have seemed unimaginable to read in official documents from European institutions. Specifically, the Commission set out measures for the short, medium and long term, which can partly be implemented with the current treaties, and partly requiring a modification to the treaties, including one to achieve a specific “fiscal capacity” of the Eurozone based on own resources, which could evolve into an autonomous Eurozone budget.

Very little has remained of all this in the Conclusion of the European Council meeting of 13 and 14 December, which merely – albeit rightly – welcomed the important steps achieved by the Economic and Financial Affairs Council with the launch from 1 March 2014 of a single mechanism for banking supervision, the cornerstone on which Banking Union is founded. The next steps must be the directives on recovery and resolution in the banking sector and for a deposit guarantee scheme, which will lead up to the possibility for the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) to recapitalise banks directly.

However, the indications of the European Council on the “roadmap for the completion of the EMU” were rather vague and minimal. Having established the principle that the completion process “will build on the EU’s institutional and legal framework”, the Council merely points out that “the immediate priority is to complete and implement the framework for stronger economic governance”. The proposals that look further than the short term have probably fallen victim to national political and electoral agendas. Where farsighted courage is required, the response has been an exasperating gradualism, failing to demonstrate the necessary determination considering the seriousness and urgency of the matter.
It is significant that, a few days before the European Council meeting, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: a just recognition of what Europe has done for peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights. But it also contains an indirect invitation to the member states to quickly complete the original design – already clearly stated in the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 – to make the European nations have a common destiny by creating a Federal Union among the member states interested.

The steps to be taken are now clear, also because of the proactive efforts of the Europeans institutions, as regards completing economic integration, with the necessary transfers of sovereignty to the Union and the possibility of differentiated integration (so that countries wanting to moving more quickly towards Federal Union can go ahead), and also as regards the institutional rules to be introduced, with a reformed Treaty applicable to the countries of the Eurozone and those that want to form part of it.

It is necessary that the Eurozone (possibly extended to other countries) acquires its own precise subjectivity and forms its own Budget in addition to that of the EU, funded by new resources (such as EU-wide carbon tax and FTT) to direct towards a Plan in favour of employment and sustainable development, able to re-launch growth in the near future. Applying just austerity to public accounts condemns the Eurozone countries to recession, decline, and the resulting social tensions, seriously undermining the chances of the process of European unification being upheld.

What we should have the courage to do right away, thus positively affecting market expectations and giving a sign of hope and confidence to the public, is for the member states interested – starting with the Eurozone – to make a solemn political undertaking. It is necessary that a group of countries and of visionary leaders accomplishes a step similar to the purposes of the Schuman Declaration, thus indicating to Europeans the direction and the goal of the path embarked on.

At the same time, the European Parliament is finally giving encouraging signs of wanting to play an active role in dealing with the economic and institutional crisis afflicting Europe. We believe that it should spend its last full year term – possibly in agreement with national parliaments – in defining the key points of the institutional reform necessary for forming the first nucleus of the European Federation. These points will be at the centre of the electoral campaign for the 2014 European elections, if possible also by means of a European consultative referendum.

If approved, that project should be entrusted to a Convention/Constituent Assembly consisting of the representatives elected by citizens at national level and in the European Parliament, as well as of the governments and of the European Commission, with the mandate to develop, within a year, a Federal Constitution. The Constitution should be ratified by referendum which would be held simultaneously in all member states. It should enter into force if ratified by the majority of States, representative of the majority of citizens.

As regards Italy, while a difficult national election date looms, it is essential that the forces and leaders fielded clearly indicate what sort of united Europe they want to build and what concrete steps they intend taking to achieve it.

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(The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the CSF)