

Is Federalism inevitable in an enlarged Europe?

Seminar/discussion at Edinburgh University, 23 of January, 7 pm

with
Jan Seifert
President of JEF-Germany

This was the first in a series of evening seminars/discussions at Edinburgh University under the framework of "Europe! A Generation Ahead". After discussions with the Young European Movement University Society, it was concluded that the idea of Federalism, with its critique of the present system and its concrete suggestion on a reform of the EU, would be a good starting point for getting the debate about the future of Europe out among the students.

Jan Seifert, president of JEF Germany agreed to come and talk about the idea of Federalism. Not only having an long past of engagement in the European federal movement, but also coming from the EU's largest federal state made Jan Seifert an excellent speaker for the topic.

An introductory speech was held by Åsa Gunvén, organiser for Europe A Generation Ahead in Scotland, about the Convention, its composition, work and aims. Also a brief background of the causes that made the governments create a Convention to reform the EU, in Leaken was given. Strong emphasis was made on the importance of the debate reaching out to civil society, and especially the young that are the ones to live in the future EU.

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Jan Seifert then took over, introducing the idea of Federalism. A informative theoretical discussion of the notion of federalism, confederation and unitary states started of the presentation. The federal multi layer institutional model was discussed with references made to federal states like the US, Switzerland and Germany. A historic perspective of

the federal movement in general, and the European federalist movement in specific, was given, with emphasis on key persons like Spinelli and early movements such as the Federal Union in the UK. Once the ground stones of federalism was laid out to the students, Jan Seifert moved on to discuss how federalism works in practice trough presenting how it works in his home country Germany. After introducing the set up of the federal state and the Länder a discussion followed on how the power is exercised through the Landtag, Bundestag and Bundesrat. Trough informative examples like education, taxation and foreign policy it was made clear how a federal state works in practice and also its problems. It was also made explicit how federalism, with the principle of subsidiarity, copes with diversity, with specific emphasis on Switzerland. Finally the case for a federal Europe was painted out drawing on the points made earlier.

Afterwards questions and debate followed. Issues like the necessity of a European identity in a federal Europe and the problems a common foreign policy and defence poses was discussed at length. After the debate the discussion continued on a informal basis as almost all participants stayed two to three hours extra, drinking some wine and talking about the issues discussed. A exercise was also handed out, asking the participants to consider on what level, in an federal or non-federal Europe, they wanted different decisions like tuition fees, environmental threats or closing time for pubs, to be taken. All the 27 participants seemed very pleased with the evening, as were we, and many asked for coming events.

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