

THE JAMES MADISON TRUST



FEDERALISMS - EAST AND WEST INDIA, EUROPE & NORTH AMERICA

28rd-30th September 2010, University of Oxford

St Antony's College, Oxford

Reflections and Conclusions John Palmer¹

For all that the subject of federalism and federalist political systems has something of a taboo character in British – or, more correctly, English – political discourse, examples of federal type systems of government seem to be increasing across Europe and the wider world. For that reason alone the conference of Federalisms – East and West, organised at St Anthony's College, Oxford in September organised by Europaeum and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, was of such value.

The conference offered a rich opportunity to compare the experience – and the challenges – of federalising developments at both European Union and EU Member State levels but also to appreciate the very different federalist systems in India, Canada, Spain and the United States. I found the explanations of the complex Indian federal constitutional system and the debate among conference participants from India about the contradictions and short comings of the system particularly enlightening.

For my part I came to understand more clearly the inherent differences between forms of federalism which have evolved as part of the basic process of "national building" – such as in Canada, India and especially the US – and the very different dynamic at work in efforts to federalise governance at the

¹ John Palmer is a leading authority in the analysis of economic and macro-political trends in the European Union and in the development of EU common foreign, security and defence policy. For more than 20 years, until 1997, he was Brussels-based European Editor of *The Guardian*. He is a member of the Advisory Board of The European Policy Centre and was Founding Political Director of the Centre (1997-2005), and Editor-in-Chief of its on-line, European, public policy, journal - *Challenge Europe*. John Palmer is a Member of the Council of the Federal Trust, London, and a Visiting Practitioner Fellow at the European Institute at the University of Sussex. He is an experienced radio and television broadcaster in both English and French. He was a Director of the Greater London Enterprise Board development agency, and also a Board Member of London Transport (1983-6). He is the author of *Europe Without America - the crisis in Atlantic relations* (OUP 1987); *Trading Places - the future of the European Community into the 21st Century* (EC, Brussels 1991). He studied at Wimbledon College and the LSE.

trans-national level and most obviously within the European Union. The conference was only able to begin to assess the implications of the seeming contradiction between the "legitimacy crisis" being experienced by the EU as a result of the recent Lisbon Treaty and the fact that objective global problems still seem to be driving the Union towards both wider and deeper forms of supra-national integration.

With the wisdom of hindsight it might have been helpful if the conference had had the opportunity to discussing the more recent debates about possible federalist forms of decision making in other transnational global regional associations apart from the EU. These take different forms and are at very different stages of development within organisations such as the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN), the South American Union (formerly MERCOSUR), the African Union and perhaps also the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Another fascinating aspect to the challenges facing "European federalisms" which might be examined in future is the contrast between the evidence of popular hesitancy and political controversy over ever greater "federalising" reforms at the European Union level and the seeming inevitability of deeper forms of federalism being adopted at the "national" level within EU Member States – such as Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain and especially the United Kingdom.

John Palmer – October 13, 2010.