

The Federal Union: Futures and Pasts of a Shared European Heritage 1515-2025

Project Introduction

Europe is in crisis. Perhaps the European Union has even entered, as many analysts like to put it, an era of ‘polycrisis’. One of our most fundamental European debates concerns the future direction of the Union, especially in terms of its democracy, its civic cultures and its geopolitics. What should the make-up of the Union be in terms of democratic institutions? What should be its foundation in terms of citizenship and civic cultures? How should citizens and policy makers address the division and workings of sovereign powers in the Union? How should the Union act in the world of geopolitics? In short, what kind Federal Union should Europe be?

The first aim of our project is to contribute to the historical study of the Federal Union as a shared European heritage. The European federal legacy is vast. Think of the federal ideas, values and practices that underpin Switzerland, Poland-Lithuania, the German lands that made up the Holy Roman Empire, the United Provinces that made up the Dutch Republic, the debates on the Union between England and Scotland, and so on. Think of the debates that underpin the processes of European integration after the Second World War.

The second aim of the project is to connect historical study with reflections on Europe’s present and future as Federal Union. In terms of history of political thought, political theory and policy making we project adopts a *longue durée* perspective, from 1515 until 2025.

Hence the starting point for the project is to set up a research network that brings together 15-20 historians of political thought, political theorists and policy makers to jointly study

some of the key dimensions of the pasts, presents and futures of 'Federal Union' in Europe.¹

So far we have identified the following key themes for the project:

- Historical Models of Federal Union
- Sharing Sovereignty within the Federal Union
- The Civic Cultures of the Federal Union
- (Transnational) Justice in the Federal Union
- The Necessity of Compromise: Federal Union and Raison d'état
- The Geopolitics of the Federal Union

For each theme we're looking to bring together historians, political theorists, policy analysts and policy makers. The first step has been to set up a small group and steering committee and to organise an exploratory workshop that took place on Monday 16 September and Tuesday 17 September 2024. The group set out the research agenda, presented first drafts of chapters and discussed opportunities for research funding.

For the workshop programme click here.

The project is co-organised with the political advisor, essayist and historian Joshua Livestro, whose study *A More Perfect Union: Federal Union in Political Thought and Practice, 1500-1951* has just been published as paperback by Amsterdam University Press. See: <https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789048567669/a-more-perfect-union>

¹ This model is based on earlier projects. See Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (eds.) *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage. Volume 1: Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe. Volume 2: The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 2002; Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (eds.) *Freedom and the Construction of Europe. Volume 1: Religious Freedom and Civil Liberty. Volume 2: Free Persons and Free States*, Cambridge, 2013.