



A Modular Federation: A New Institutional Architecture for Europe

A practical proposal for a democratic, flexible and sovereign European Union

Executive Summary

The European Union has reached a point where incremental institutional reform is no longer sufficient. Repeated crises over the past two decades—including financial instability, migration, the pandemic, geopolitical conflict, energy insecurity and declining competitiveness—have exposed structural weaknesses that cannot be resolved within the existing institutional framework.

The current model attempts to reconcile two increasingly contradictory objectives: deeper political integration and the preservation of national sovereignty. The result has been growing institutional complexity, declining democratic legitimacy, political paralysis and widening differences between Member States. Europe today is neither a genuine federation capable of decisive action nor a flexible community of sovereign nations. It has become an institutional hybrid that satisfies neither objective.

This paper argues that the future of European integration should not be framed as a choice between further centralisation and gradual disintegration. Both approaches ignore Europe's political, cultural and historical diversity. Instead, Europe requires a new institutional architecture capable of combining effective cooperation with democratic legitimacy and respect for national sovereignty.

The proposed **Modular Federation** offers such a framework. It establishes a common constitutional core for areas essential to the functioning of the European political community while allowing Member States to participate voluntarily in additional policy modules according to their democratic choices, strategic interests and constitutional traditions. Rather than imposing uniformity, it institutionalises flexibility within a coherent legal structure.

The proposal builds upon mechanisms that already exist within today's European Union—including Schengen, the euro area, PESCO and differentiated integration—but transforms them into a transparent and coherent constitutional model. It strengthens democratic accountability by clearly defining competences, reducing institutional overlap and enabling citizens to understand who is responsible for political decisions at both the European and national levels.

The Modular Federation also creates a practical path for future enlargement. Instead of forcing candidate countries into an "all or nothing" model of membership, it allows gradual participation through specific cooperation modules, making European integration more realistic, more inclusive and more resilient.

The objective is not to replace the European Union but to reform it into a political community that reflects Europe's diversity while preserving its unity. A Europe built on voluntary cooperation, democratic legitimacy and clearly defined responsibilities will be better equipped



to protect its sovereignty, strengthen its competitiveness and restore citizens' confidence in the European project.

The Modular Federation is therefore not a utopian alternative to the European Union. It is a pragmatic institutional evolution of the European project—one that seeks to preserve cooperation by replacing rigid uniformity with structured flexibility, and political centralisation with democratic legitimacy.

1. Why Europe Needs Institutional Reform

The European Union is entering a period in which institutional reform is no longer optional but essential for its long-term stability and legitimacy. The succession of crises over the past two decades—the financial crisis, the migration crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy shock, the war in Ukraine and growing geopolitical competition—has demonstrated not only operational weaknesses but structural deficiencies within the Union's current institutional model.

These crises have repeatedly exposed the same pattern. Decisions are often slow, responsibilities remain unclear, political accountability is diffused, and consensus becomes increasingly difficult to achieve as the Union expands in both membership and competences. The institutional architecture designed for a much smaller and more homogeneous European Community has struggled to adapt to a Union of twenty-seven Member States with different historical experiences, constitutional traditions, economic priorities and security perceptions.

The original European project sought to reconcile cooperation among sovereign nations with democratic legitimacy. Over time, however, the balance has gradually shifted towards increasing centralisation without a corresponding strengthening of democratic accountability. European institutions have acquired broader competences, while many citizens increasingly perceive that important political decisions are taken further away from democratic control. National governments frequently attribute unpopular decisions to Brussels, while European institutions point to the Member States. Responsibility has become fragmented, making democratic accountability increasingly difficult to identify.

This institutional imbalance has contributed to a steady decline in public confidence. Across Europe, political movements advocating greater national sovereignty, institutional reform or a different model of European integration have gained electoral support. The growing influence of parties belonging to groups such as the **Patriots for Europe**, the **European Conservatives and Reformists**, as well as various sovereignty-oriented parties outside these parliamentary families, illustrates that dissatisfaction with the current institutional trajectory is no longer confined to the political margins. Although these movements differ substantially in ideology and policy priorities, they share one common concern: the conviction that the present institutional model no longer adequately reflects the democratic will, strategic interests and constitutional diversity of Europe's nations.

Rather than opening a comprehensive debate on institutional reform, these developments have often deepened political polarisation. Calls for greater subsidiarity, democratic accountability or institutional flexibility are frequently interpreted as opposition to European cooperation itself. As a consequence, the public debate has increasingly become trapped within a false dichotomy: either support further political centralisation or accept gradual fragmentation of the European project. This binary choice excludes a broad range of alternative institutional



solutions capable of strengthening European cooperation while respecting legitimate national diversity.

The current model also struggles to respond effectively to Europe's evolving strategic environment. Technological competition, demographic decline, energy security, industrial competitiveness, defence, cognitive security and external geopolitical pressures require coordinated action at the European level. Yet these common challenges coexist with legitimate differences in national interests, constitutional traditions and democratic preferences. Attempting to impose uniform solutions across all policy areas has frequently generated political resistance rather than greater unity.

The experience of recent years demonstrates that the European Union already operates through differentiated integration. The euro area, the Schengen Area, PESCO, enhanced cooperation mechanisms and numerous opt-outs illustrate that varying levels of participation have become an established feature of European governance. Yet this differentiated reality has never been fully reflected in the Union's constitutional architecture. Instead, flexibility has developed incrementally, often through ad hoc political compromises rather than a coherent institutional design.

Europe therefore faces a fundamental constitutional challenge. It must preserve the benefits of cooperation without undermining democratic legitimacy. It must strengthen common strategic capacities without unnecessarily centralising political authority. It must remain united without requiring uniformity.

The question is therefore no longer whether the European Union requires institutional reform. The real question is whether that reform will continue to rely on incremental adjustments to an increasingly strained institutional model, or whether Europe is prepared to adopt a new constitutional architecture capable of reconciling unity with diversity, common action with national sovereignty, and European integration with democratic legitimacy.

The Modular Federation is proposed as one possible answer to this challenge. It does not seek to replace the European project, but to provide it with an institutional structure better suited to the political realities of the twenty-first century.

2. Why Current Reform Proposals Are Insufficient

The debate on the future of the European Union has increasingly become polarised between two opposing visions. One advocates deeper political integration through the transfer of additional competences to European institutions. The other argues for returning significant powers to the Member States, reducing the role of supranational governance. Although these positions differ fundamentally, both are constrained by the same assumption: that Europe's future must be built either through greater centralisation or through the restoration of traditional national sovereignty.

Neither approach adequately reflects Europe's contemporary political reality.

The federalist vision assumes that Europe's growing strategic challenges can only be addressed through stronger common institutions, broader European competences and more uniform policies. It correctly recognises that fragmented responses are often ineffective in areas such as defence, technological competition, energy security and external relations. However, it



underestimates the political, cultural and constitutional diversity of Europe. Attempts to impose increasing uniformity upon societies with different historical experiences, democratic preferences and strategic priorities have frequently generated greater resistance rather than stronger unity. Political integration without sufficient democratic legitimacy risks weakening, rather than strengthening, the European project.

The opposite approach, centred on the recovery of national sovereignty, correctly identifies many of the democratic and institutional weaknesses that have emerged within the present Union. It reflects growing public concerns regarding subsidiarity, democratic accountability and excessive centralisation. Yet a simple return to an exclusively intergovernmental Europe is equally unrealistic. No European state, regardless of its size, can independently address the technological, geopolitical, economic and security challenges created by global competition. Strategic autonomy in the twenty-first century increasingly requires cooperation rather than isolation.

The growing electoral support for sovereignty-oriented political movements across Europe illustrates this dilemma. Groups such as the **Patriots for Europe**, the **European Conservatives and Reformists**, together with numerous national sovereignty parties outside these parliamentary families, demonstrate that significant parts of European society are seeking institutional alternatives. At the same time, pro-integration forces continue to argue that only stronger European institutions can preserve Europe's global influence. The result is a political debate increasingly characterised by mutual exclusion rather than institutional innovation.

This binary confrontation has produced institutional paralysis. Federalists often interpret demands for greater subsidiarity as opposition to European integration itself, while many sovereignty movements reject further institutional development because existing proposals appear synonymous with centralisation. As a consequence, Europe has become trapped between two competing projects, neither of which is capable of commanding broad democratic consensus across the Union.

The problem is therefore not that either side is entirely wrong. Both identify genuine weaknesses within the existing system. The weakness lies in the assumption that only one of these visions can prevail.

Europe's diversity is not a temporary obstacle that can eventually be eliminated through harmonisation. It is a permanent structural characteristic of the European civilisation. Differences in constitutional traditions, historical memory, security perceptions, economic models and political cultures are unlikely to disappear. Any durable institutional architecture must therefore be capable of accommodating diversity rather than attempting to replace it with uniformity.

The European Union already demonstrates this reality in practice. The euro area, the Schengen Area, PESCO, enhanced cooperation mechanisms and numerous treaty opt-outs all represent different forms of differentiated integration. Europe has already become partially modular. What remains missing is a coherent constitutional framework capable of organising this reality transparently, democratically and strategically.

The question is therefore no longer whether Europe should become more federal or more national. The more important question is how Europe can combine effective common action



with democratic legitimacy, strategic cohesion with national sovereignty, and institutional flexibility with legal certainty.

The Modular Federation proposes such a third path. It accepts Europe's diversity as a permanent political reality while transforming it from a source of institutional conflict into the organising principle of European cooperation. Instead of asking every Member State to participate equally in every policy area, it creates a constitutional framework in which cooperation becomes both voluntary and structured, preserving unity where common action is essential while respecting democratic differences where uniformity is neither necessary nor desirable.

In this sense, the Modular Federation should not be understood as a compromise between federalism and intergovernmentalism. It represents a different constitutional philosophy altogether. Rather than choosing between centralisation and fragmentation, it seeks to build a European political community based upon flexibility, subsidiarity, democratic legitimacy and shared strategic interests.

3. The Modular Federation

The Modular Federation is founded on a simple but fundamental observation: Europe's diversity is not a temporary obstacle to integration but a permanent characteristic of European civilization. The attempt to organise such diversity through increasingly uniform political structures has repeatedly produced institutional tensions, declining public trust and growing resistance among Member States. The objective of reform should therefore not be to eliminate diversity, but to organise it more effectively.

The Modular Federation proposes a constitutional framework that combines a common European foundation with differentiated forms of cooperation. It recognises that not every Member State must participate equally in every policy area in order for Europe to remain united. Instead of measuring integration by the degree of centralisation, it measures integration by the effectiveness of cooperation where common action genuinely serves the interests of participating states and European citizens.

Its starting point is the distinction between what Europe must do together and what should remain the responsibility of democratic nation states. A common constitutional core guarantees the essential foundations of the European political community, including democratic principles, the rule of law, fundamental rights and the internal market. Beyond this common core, cooperation is organised through clearly defined policy modules in which Member States participate voluntarily according to their democratic choices, constitutional traditions and strategic interests.

This principle of voluntary participation transforms the logic of European integration. Cooperation ceases to be perceived as an obligation imposed by central institutions and becomes a democratic choice made by sovereign states. Participation in additional modules derives its legitimacy not from institutional pressure but from political consent. States cooperate because cooperation creates measurable benefits, not because uniform participation is treated as an ideological objective in itself.

Such flexibility does not weaken Europe. On the contrary, it makes European cooperation more resilient. Today's European Union already contains differentiated structures such as the euro area, Schengen, PESCO and enhanced cooperation mechanisms. These arrangements



demonstrate that differentiated integration is not an exception but an established reality. The Modular Federation simply provides this reality with a coherent constitutional framework, replacing political improvisation with transparent institutional design.

The principle of subsidiarity also acquires practical meaning within this model. Decisions are taken at the lowest effective level capable of addressing a given problem. Matters that require genuinely European solutions remain within the common framework, while areas closely connected to national identity, constitutional traditions or domestic political preferences remain under national democratic control. This restores clarity regarding competences, strengthens political accountability and reduces unnecessary institutional conflict.

One of the greatest advantages of the Modular Federation is its capacity to reduce centrifugal forces within the European project. Under the current institutional model, disagreement often develops into confrontation because participation is largely organised on an "all or nothing" basis. States that oppose deeper integration frequently face the choice between accepting unwanted policies or questioning their place within the Union itself. Brexit demonstrated the political risks of such institutional rigidity.

The Modular Federation offers an alternative. A Member State that wishes to reduce participation in one policy area does not need to leave the European project altogether. It may remain fully integrated within the common constitutional core while adjusting its participation in specific modules according to democratic decisions taken at national level. Institutional flexibility therefore becomes a mechanism for preserving European unity rather than threatening it.

This approach also reduces political conflict between Member States. Uniform solutions imposed upon politically diverse societies inevitably produce winners and losers. Flexible cooperation allows groups of states sharing similar strategic priorities to advance integration without compelling others to follow immediately. Rather than creating permanent divisions, this enables different levels of integration to coexist within a stable constitutional order. Countries prepared for deeper cooperation may move forward, while others retain the opportunity to participate later under the same transparent legal framework.

Equally important, the Modular Federation strengthens democratic legitimacy. Citizens gain a clearer understanding of which decisions are taken jointly and which remain the responsibility of their national governments. Political accountability becomes more transparent because competences are explicitly defined rather than dispersed across overlapping institutional levels. National democratic processes regain significance without weakening Europe's collective capacity to act where common interests require cooperation.

The model also creates a more realistic framework for the future enlargement of the European political community. Instead of requiring candidate countries to accept immediate participation in every aspect of integration, new members or associated European partners could gradually participate in individual modules according to their level of preparedness and mutual interests. This transforms enlargement from a binary political decision into a gradual process of structured integration, reducing political tensions while strengthening long-term European cohesion.

The Modular Federation is therefore neither a federal superstate nor a return to a loose confederation of independent governments. It represents a new constitutional philosophy based



on differentiated integration, democratic legitimacy and structured flexibility. It preserves the strategic advantages of European cooperation while recognising that durable unity cannot be built upon compulsory uniformity.

Its central principle is straightforward: **Europe should remain united where unity creates strength, while remaining diverse where diversity strengthens democracy.** Rather than forcing Europe to choose between centralisation and fragmentation, the Modular Federation offers a constitutional framework capable of reconciling sovereignty with cooperation, flexibility with stability, and diversity with cohesion.

4. Institutional Architecture

The Modular Federation is not a proposal to replace the European Union with an entirely new political system. It is a proposal to reorganise European governance according to a clearer constitutional logic, distinguishing between competences that require common European action and those that should remain under national democratic control.

Its institutional architecture rests upon three interconnected levels of governance: a **European level**, responsible for matters where unity is indispensable; a **shared level**, where participation is organised through voluntary policy modules; and a **national level**, where democratic sovereignty remains the guiding principle. The objective is not to redistribute power arbitrarily, but to allocate responsibilities according to the principle that decisions should be taken at the lowest effective level capable of addressing the issue.

The **European constitutional core** should remain limited to those areas in which fragmentation would directly weaken Europe's collective security, economic stability or international position. Foreign policy, common security and defence, protection of external borders, the internal market and critical strategic infrastructure require coherent European action because their effectiveness depends upon collective capacity rather than national fragmentation. These competences therefore belong permanently within the common constitutional framework.

A second category consists of **shared policy modules**. These include areas such as energy, transport, industrial policy, scientific research, environmental policy and demographic cooperation. While all Member States benefit from cooperation in these fields, they do not necessarily require identical levels of participation or identical political solutions. The Modular Federation therefore allows groups of Member States to deepen cooperation voluntarily through clearly defined legal modules, while leaving open the possibility for other countries to join when domestic democratic conditions permit. Flexibility becomes a permanent constitutional principle rather than an exceptional political compromise.

The **national level** preserves those competences most closely connected with democratic identity, constitutional traditions and cultural diversity. Education, language policy, family policy, healthcare, social protection, culture and other areas that reflect different historical experiences remain primarily under national responsibility. European cooperation may support these policies where appropriate, but it should not replace democratic choices made within Member States.

This distribution of competences provides greater constitutional clarity than the current system, where overlapping responsibilities frequently generate institutional conflict and political



confusion. Citizens should be able to understand which level of government is responsible for a particular decision and to hold that level democratically accountable.

Institutionally, the Modular Federation preserves the principal European institutions while adapting their roles to this clearer constitutional structure.

The **European Parliament** remains the directly elected democratic institution representing European citizens. Its legislative authority is concentrated on matters belonging to the common constitutional core, while legislation concerning optional modules applies only to participating Member States. This strengthens democratic legitimacy by ensuring that parliamentary decisions correspond to the actual scope of European competences.

The **European Commission** continues to serve as the executive institution responsible for implementing common policies, safeguarding the Treaties and coordinating cooperation between the common constitutional framework and the various policy modules. Rather than expanding administrative centralisation, its primary role becomes ensuring coherence, transparency and equal application of agreed rules.

The **Council**, representing Member States, remains the principal institution through which national governments participate in European decision-making. Under the Modular Federation, however, voting structures become more transparent because only participating states take part in decisions concerning voluntary modules, while common constitutional matters continue to require participation by all members of the core.

The **Court of Justice** preserves its essential function of guaranteeing legal certainty and protecting the constitutional order of the Federation. Its jurisdiction extends to the common constitutional framework and to the legal commitments voluntarily accepted by Member States within individual cooperation modules, thereby ensuring equal legal protection while respecting differentiated participation.

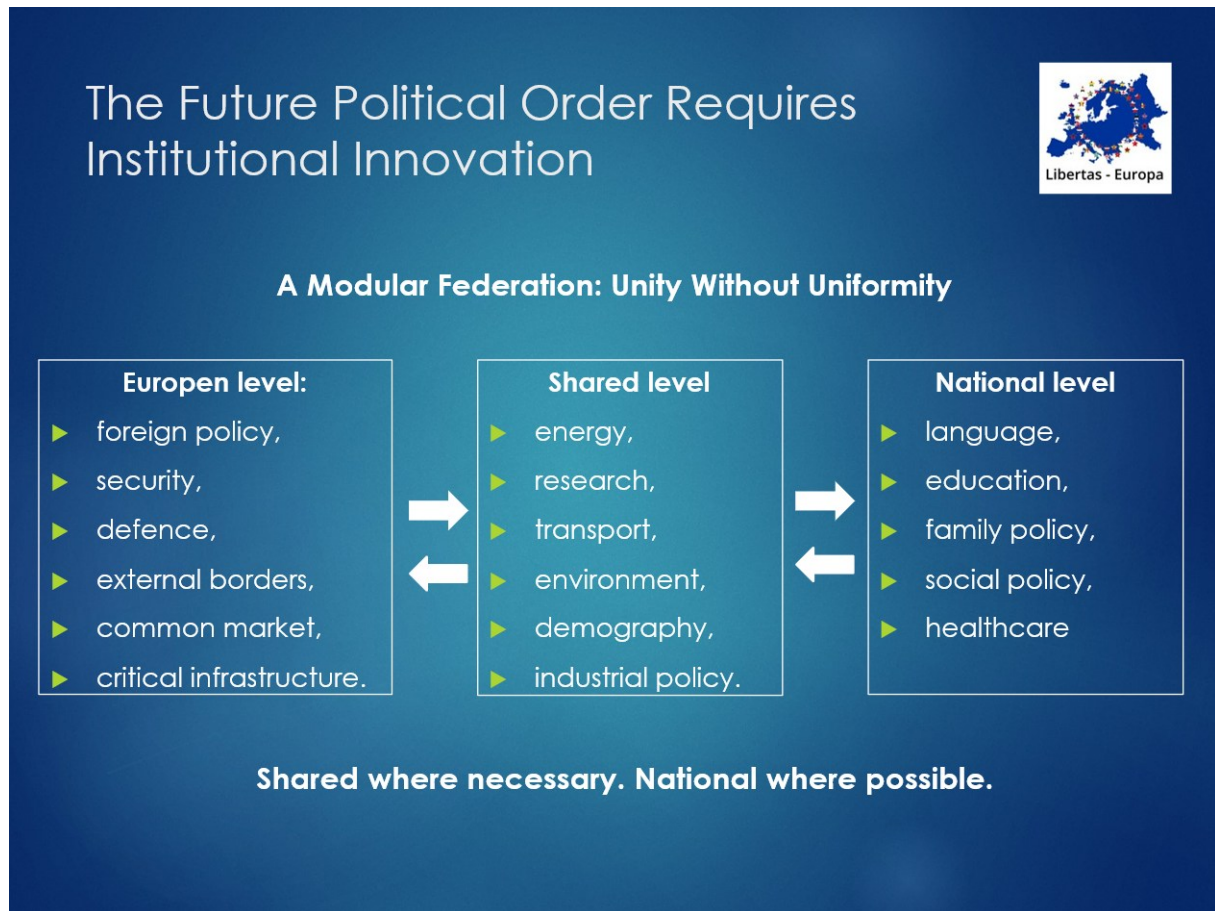
Decision-making consequently becomes both simpler and more legitimate. Issues belonging to the common constitutional core are decided collectively because they concern the Union as a whole. Decisions concerning individual modules are taken only by participating Member States according to previously agreed procedures, while national competences remain entirely within domestic democratic processes. This eliminates many of the tensions created when states are required to participate equally in policies they have not chosen to pursue.

The resulting institutional model is neither a federal superstate nor a loose intergovernmental organisation. It is a constitutional system built upon differentiated integration, democratic legitimacy and subsidiarity. By distinguishing clearly between common responsibilities, shared cooperation and national sovereignty, the Modular Federation transforms Europe's existing complexity into a transparent and coherent institutional architecture capable of adapting to future political, economic and geopolitical challenges.



Figure 1. Institutional Logic of the Modular Federation

Shared where necessary. National where possible.



4.1 Allocation of Competences

One of the principal objectives of the Modular Federation is to eliminate uncertainty regarding institutional competences. The distinction between the constitutional core, shared policy modules and national competences should therefore not depend upon changing political majorities but upon clearly defined constitutional principles.

Competences forming the European constitutional core should be established by the Constitutional Charter itself and modified only through the constitutional amendment procedure. Shared policy modules should likewise be created and amended according to transparent constitutional criteria rather than ordinary political negotiation.

The Constitutional Court of the Federation shall guarantee the constitutional distribution of competences and ensure that neither European institutions nor Member States exceed the powers assigned to them by the Constitutional Charter.

4.2 Constitutional Hierarchy and Conflict Resolution

Differentiated integration inevitably creates situations where different policy modules interact. Legal certainty therefore requires a clear constitutional hierarchy.



The Constitutional Charter forms the supreme legal framework of the Federation. European constitutional competences take precedence over policy modules, while module legislation applies only within the scope voluntarily accepted by participating Member States. National legislation remains fully applicable in areas reserved to national competence.

Where competences overlap or legal conflicts arise between the constitutional core, individual modules or national legislation, the Constitutional Court shall serve as the final arbiter. This prevents legal fragmentation while preserving institutional flexibility.

4.3 Open Modules and Equal Access

The Modular Federation rejects the creation of exclusive political clubs within Europe.

Every policy module shall remain permanently open to any Member State fulfilling the agreed legal, financial and operational conditions. Participation shall never depend upon political preference or the approval of individual Member States but exclusively upon objective constitutional criteria.

This principle ensures equal opportunities for participation while preventing differentiated integration from creating permanent divisions between "first-class" and "second-class" members.

4.4 Financial Responsibility

The financial architecture of the Modular Federation reflects its institutional structure.

The constitutional core shall be financed collectively because it serves the common interests of the entire Federation. Individual policy modules shall be financed primarily by participating Member States according to agreed contribution mechanisms and corresponding benefits.

This creates a transparent relationship between participation, responsibility and financial solidarity while avoiding unnecessary disputes concerning policies in which particular Member States have chosen not to participate.

5. Transition Towards a Modular Federation

The transition towards a Modular Federation should not be understood as a constitutional rupture but as a gradual evolution of the existing European Union. The objective is not to dismantle current institutions or replace the European legal order overnight. Rather, it is to reorganise and clarify an integration process that has already become differentiated in practice but remains institutionally inconsistent.

The European Union already contains many elements of differentiated integration. The euro area, the Schengen Area, PESCO, enhanced cooperation mechanisms and numerous national opt-outs demonstrate that Member States already participate in European policies at different levels. The Modular Federation does not invent this reality; it provides it with a coherent constitutional framework.

For this reason, implementation should proceed through three successive phases.



Phase One – Pilot Modules

The first phase should focus on policy areas where deeper cooperation already enjoys broad political support. Energy security, defence cooperation, critical infrastructure, industrial policy, scientific research and strategic technologies provide suitable starting points because they combine clear European added value with practical experience of existing cooperation.

Participation should remain voluntary and open. States willing to advance cooperation should be able to do so without requiring immediate participation by all Member States. At the same time, every module should remain accessible to countries wishing to join later under transparent legal conditions. Early success would demonstrate the practical advantages of structured flexibility and gradually build confidence in the broader institutional model.

Phase Two – A European Constitutional Charter

Once differentiated cooperation has become institutionally established, the second phase should consolidate these developments within a common constitutional framework. A European Constitutional Charter would clearly distinguish between the permanent constitutional core, shared policy modules and national competences, replacing the current accumulation of overlapping treaties with a simpler and more transparent institutional architecture.

The Charter would not fundamentally redefine the values of the European Union. Rather, it would clarify institutional responsibilities, democratic accountability and decision-making procedures while embedding differentiated integration within a stable constitutional order. Citizens, national governments and European institutions would gain a clearer understanding of who is responsible for which decisions and under what democratic authority.

Phase Three – Dynamic Constitutional Review

The final phase recognises that European integration should remain adaptive rather than static. Economic development, technological change, demographic trends and geopolitical circumstances will continue to evolve, and the institutional architecture must be capable of evolving with them.

The Modular Federation should therefore incorporate regular constitutional review based on democratic participation, transparent evaluation and practical experience. Policy modules may expand, merge, evolve or, where appropriate, be discontinued according to changing strategic needs and the democratic choices of participating Member States. New areas of cooperation may emerge, while others may return to national responsibility if common action no longer provides sufficient added value.

Such flexibility represents one of the principal strengths of the Modular Federation. Instead of forcing Europe into a rigid institutional model requiring comprehensive treaty revisions whenever circumstances change, it creates a constitutional framework capable of gradual adaptation while preserving legal certainty and democratic legitimacy.

The transition therefore becomes a process of continuous institutional improvement rather than periodic constitutional crisis. European integration evolves through practical cooperation, democratic consent and measurable results rather than through political confrontation between competing visions of Europe.



By building upon mechanisms that already exist, respecting the democratic choices of Member States and introducing change progressively rather than abruptly, the Modular Federation offers a realistic path towards a stronger, more resilient and more legitimate European Union.

5.1 Constitutional Evolution

The Modular Federation is designed as a dynamic constitutional system rather than a fixed institutional settlement.

European cooperation will continue to evolve in response to technological development, demographic change, security challenges and geopolitical transformation. The Constitutional Charter should therefore provide for regular institutional review while preserving legal certainty.

New policy modules may be created where common action generates demonstrable European added value. Existing modules may evolve, merge or conclude once their objectives have been achieved. Temporary strategic modules—for example in response to exceptional security, technological or public health challenges—may also be established for limited periods under clearly defined constitutional conditions.

In this way, institutional adaptation becomes an ordinary constitutional process rather than a recurring political crisis requiring comprehensive treaty revision.

6. Why the Modular Federation Is a Realistic Reform

Institutional reform proposals are often criticised for being politically unrealistic or constitutionally unattainable. The Modular Federation, however, is not based on abstract constitutional theory or the creation of entirely new political institutions. It is founded upon institutional practices that already exist within today's European Union and seeks to organise them into a coherent constitutional framework.

The European Union is already partially modular. The euro area, the Schengen Area, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), enhanced cooperation mechanisms, opt-outs and differentiated participation in numerous policy areas demonstrate that Member States already integrate at different speeds and to different degrees. These arrangements have emerged gradually in response to political realities rather than constitutional design. The Modular Federation simply recognises this evolution and transforms it into a transparent and democratically accountable institutional architecture.

For this reason, the proposal should not be understood as a revolutionary departure from the existing European project. It represents an evolutionary reform that builds upon mechanisms that have already proven politically and legally workable. Rather than replacing the European Union, it seeks to improve its institutional coherence by replacing ad hoc exceptions with clearly defined constitutional principles.

A second criticism often suggests that differentiated integration would inevitably weaken European unity. The opposite is more likely. Political unity cannot be sustained indefinitely through institutional rigidity. As the Union becomes larger and more diverse, attempts to apply identical policies to all Member States increasingly generate political resistance and



institutional deadlock. Flexibility should therefore be understood not as a threat to European integration but as one of the conditions for its long-term survival.

The experience of Brexit illustrates this lesson. The United Kingdom did not reject cooperation with Europe; it rejected an institutional framework that many of its citizens considered increasingly incompatible with their democratic preferences. Under a modular constitutional system, disagreements over particular policy areas would not necessarily require questioning membership itself. Member States could adjust their level of participation within specific modules while remaining fully committed to the common constitutional core. Institutional flexibility therefore reduces the likelihood that political disagreement evolves into constitutional rupture.

The Modular Federation also strengthens enlargement policy. The current accession model requires candidate countries to accept an extensive body of obligations before becoming full members, creating long negotiation processes and repeated political uncertainty. A modular framework allows gradual participation in individual policy areas according to objective criteria and mutual readiness. Candidate countries would become integrated progressively rather than through an "all-or-nothing" decision, making enlargement more credible, more flexible and more politically sustainable.

Equally important, the proposal does not diminish the role of the nation state. On the contrary, it reinforces democratic legitimacy by recognising that national constitutional identities remain an essential component of European democracy. Sovereignty is not abolished but reorganised. Areas requiring common strategic action remain genuinely European, while matters better decided at national level return to national democratic responsibility. This clearer allocation of competences reduces institutional conflict and strengthens political accountability at every level of governance.

The Modular Federation is therefore neither a federal superstate nor a return to a loose confederation. It represents a constitutional evolution that reflects Europe's political diversity, strategic challenges and democratic realities more accurately than the current institutional model. It accepts that integration is neither uniform nor static and provides a legal framework capable of accommodating this reality without sacrificing coherence or stability.

Its realism lies precisely in the fact that it does not attempt to invent a new Europe. It seeks to organise the Europe that already exists.

Rather than asking Member States to choose between deeper centralisation and gradual fragmentation, it offers a constitutional architecture capable of preserving both unity and diversity. In doing so, it transforms differentiated integration from a temporary political compromise into the organising principle of a more resilient, more democratic and more strategically effective European Union.

7. Conclusion

Europe United Without Coercion

Europe has reached a constitutional crossroads. The institutional model that has served European integration for decades has delivered peace, prosperity and unprecedented cooperation. Yet the political, economic and geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century



increasingly expose its structural limitations. Growing diversity among Member States, accelerating global competition and rising demands for democratic accountability require an institutional framework capable of combining effective common action with respect for national sovereignty.

The choice facing Europe is often presented as one between deeper centralisation and gradual fragmentation. This paper has argued that both alternatives are incomplete. Centralisation alone cannot accommodate Europe's enduring political and cultural diversity, while fragmentation would weaken Europe's capacity to protect its strategic interests in an increasingly competitive world.

The Modular Federation offers a third constitutional path. It preserves the European project while adapting it to contemporary realities. It recognises that unity does not require uniformity and that sovereignty and cooperation are not mutually exclusive. By distinguishing clearly between common European competences, voluntary policy modules and national responsibilities, it transforms diversity from a source of institutional conflict into a foundation for more resilient and democratic integration.

The proposal is neither revolutionary nor utopian. It builds upon mechanisms that already exist within the European Union and organises them into a coherent constitutional architecture. It strengthens democratic legitimacy by clarifying responsibilities, increases institutional flexibility without sacrificing legal certainty, and provides a realistic framework for future enlargement and long-term strategic cooperation.

Ultimately, the future of Europe will not depend solely on economic performance, military capabilities or technological innovation. It will depend on whether Europeans are able to renew the political architecture through which they cooperate while preserving the democratic legitimacy upon which that cooperation rests.

The objective is therefore not simply institutional reform.

It is the renewal of the European political project itself.

A Europe capable of combining unity with diversity, common action with democratic choice and strategic strength with national identity will be better prepared to face the challenges of the coming decades than either an increasingly centralised union or a progressively fragmented continent.

The future of Europe should not be built on coercion, but on consent; not on institutional uniformity, but on constitutional flexibility; not on permanent political conflict, but on voluntary cooperation.

Europe united without coercion.

Libertas Europa, 1.7.2026



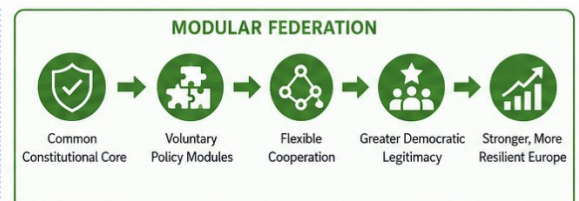
Table 1. Current European Union vs. Modular Federation

Current European Union	Modular Federation
One-speed integration	Multiple voluntary speeds
Increasing centralisation	Subsidiarity as the organising principle
Uniform institutional model	Flexible institutional architecture
Binary membership (inside or outside)	Differentiated participation through modules
Exit as the only structural alternative (e.g. Brexit)	Partial participation without leaving the Union
Frequent institutional conflicts	Clearly defined competences
Overlapping responsibilities	Transparent allocation of powers
Democratic deficit	Stronger democratic legitimacy
Ad hoc differentiated integration	Constitutional differentiation
Bureaucratic complexity	Simpler and more transparent governance
Reactive crisis management	Adaptive and resilient institutional framework
Political confrontation	Cooperative constitutional flexibility

CURRENT EU vs. MODULAR FEDERATION

A NEW INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE FOR EUROPE

CURRENT EUROPEAN UNION		MODULAR FEDERATION	
	One-speed integration		 Multiple voluntary speeds
	Increasing centralisation		 Subsidiarity as the organising principle
	Uniform institutional model		 Flexible institutional architecture
	Binary membership (inside or outside)		 Differentiated participation through modules
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	Frequent institutional conflicts		 Clearly defined competences
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	Bureaucratic complexity		 Simpler and more transparent governance
	Reactive crisis management		 Adaptive and resilient institutional framework
	Political confrontation		 Cooperative constitutional flexibility



Unity where we must act together. Diversity where we can decide differently. A Europe of free nations, **common purpose** and **shared future**.



TWO PATHS FOR EUROPE'S FUTURE

From Institutional Deadlock to Flexible Cooperation

TODAY: CURRENT EUROPEAN UNION



CENTRALISATION



POLITICAL RESISTANCE



INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT



GROWING FRAGMENTATION

TOMORROW: MODULAR FEDERATION



COMMON CONSTITUTIONAL CORE



VOLUNTARY POLICY MODULES



FLEXIBLE COOPERATION



GREATER DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY



STRONGER EUROPEAN UNION



EUROPE UNITED WITHOUT COERCION.

Unity where it is necessary. Diversity where it is possible.
Sovereignty respected. Cooperation strengthened.

