



## **Workshop on Federalism - Call for Papers**

13<sup>th</sup> June 2025  
University of Liverpool

### **Federalism, Conflict Management, and the Paradox of Unity**

Federalism represents a form of state organization that combines *self-rule* and *shared rule* across multiple layers of government (Fabbrini 2025, 148). A central focus in the literature is the so-called *paradox of federalism* (Erk & Anderson 2010): while decentralization is often intended to accommodate disaffected or marginalized communities, it can also fuel further demands for autonomy or even secession. Yet, other scholars contend that federal reforms grounded in the principle of self-rule alongside shared rule offer a constructive framework for managing conflict in divided societies (e.g., Elazar 1986; O'Leary & McGarry 1995; Vandenberghe 2023).

The prospect of a United Ireland raises what might be termed the *paradox of Irish unity*: an initiative aimed at unifying the island may risk destabilizing one of Europe's most enduring democratic states. This workshop aims to explore what insights European experiences of federalism and devolution—particularly in Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the UK—can offer to debates on Irish reunification. We are especially interested in the capacity of federal arrangements to provide substantive, symbolic, and institutional representation for minorities while maintaining overall stability in deeply divided contexts.

We also welcome papers that explore the role of the European Union as a supranational actor capable of easing fears among minority populations by mitigating the dominance of central state authority.

This workshop seeks to assess *holding-together* federal and devolutionary strategies implemented to reduce tensions and contain independence movements in European states. We invite comparative and country-specific studies, as well as papers focusing on the European Union. The panel is methodologically pluralist and encourages diverse approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, and theoretical contributions.

#### **Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:**

- How effective are federal or devolutionary reforms in managing territorial, ethnic, or linguistic conflict in Europe?

- Do *holding-together* federal arrangements mitigate or exacerbate secessionist demands?
- In what ways do different federal models facilitate the inclusion of marginalized communities?
- How does EU membership shape the relationship between central governments and regional entities?
- What mechanisms within federal or devolved systems best address minority concerns?
- What lessons can be drawn from past reforms in Belgium, Italy, Spain, or the UK?
- How have European states balanced self-rule and shared rule amid rising demands for independence?
- Can federalism offer a viable framework for future constitutional arrangements in the UK and Ireland?
- How have previous federal reforms contributed to either the resolution or escalation of political crises?

We welcome submissions from scholars across disciplines and career stages. Please submit abstracts (250–300 words) and a short bio by 10<sup>th</sup> May via this [Google Form](#). Please note that the Workshop will be held in person at the University of Liverpool on June 13<sup>th</sup>.

For further information or to submit your proposal, contact: [J.Arlow@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:J.Arlow@liverpool.ac.uk) or [harikrishnan.sasikumar@dcu.ie](mailto:harikrishnan.sasikumar@dcu.ie).

References:

- Elazar, D. J. 1987. *Exploring federalism*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press.
- Erk, J., & Anderson, L. M. (Eds.) 2010. *The paradox of federalism: Does self-rule accommodate or exacerbate ethnic divisions?* London: Routledge.
- Fabbrini, S. 2025. *A Federalist Alternative for European Governance: The European Union in hard times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O’Leary, B., & McGarry, J. 1995. Regulating nations and ethnic communities. In A. Breton, G. Galeotti, P. Salmon, & R. Wintrobe (Eds.), *Nationalism and rationality* (pp. 245–289). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vandenberghe, M. 2023. Power-Sharing and the Paradox of Federalism: Federalization and the Evolution of Ethno-Territorial Conflict in the Case of Belgium (1979–2018), *Ethnopolitics*, 22(5), pp 485-506.

*This project is supported by the [James Madison Charitable Trust](#).*