Angela : sois malheureuse dans une alliance heureuse !

par François-Xavier Faucounau, Ségolène Guinard, Ivon Lalova, François Petitjean et Emmanuelle Rica (étudiants à HEC) [1]

Pas d'euro-bonds « tant que je serai en vie », avait déclaré la Chancelière allemande en juin dernier. Sa réélection, le 22 septembre, renforce l'opposition allemande à l'émission par la BCE d'euro-obligations, titres qui permettraient de mutualiser la dette des différents Etats de la zone euro, de la Grèce à l'Allemagne. Ces coups de sang médiatiques masquent pourtant des initiatives qui ressemblent à s'y méprendre à des tentatives de mutualisation de dettes européennes. En 2012, une expérimentation sur les project bonds a été lancée par la Commission européenne sur la base de 230 millions d'euros. Or ceux-ci peuvent constituer un outil efficace de la politique de cohésion de la zone et un pas vers une intégration croissante.

Certains font des project bonds des « bébés euro-bonds »[2]. En fait de rejetons de la mutualisation de la dette, il s'agirait plutôt d'emprunts souscrits en commun par les États membres de la zone euro auprès d'investisseurs privés. Ces ressources financières seront investies dans des projets visant à l'amélioration des infrastructures, des transports, de l'approvisionnement énergétique et des technologies de l'information et de la communication. La responsabilité du bon remboursement de ces project-bonds demeure aux mains de la Commission. Bien que la souscription collective rende ces bonds semblables aux euro-bonds, la finalité des dépenses est pré-définie dans le cas des Project bonds alors qu'elle serait destinée à financer les dépenses publiques au sens large pour les euro-bonds.

Par ailleurs une mutualisation de fonds provenant des membres de la zone européenne a déjà été utilisée au plus fort de la crise. En effet, le Mécanisme de stabilité européen (MES),

décidé à la suite de la crise grecque en décembre 2010 et entré en vigueur en octobre 2012, a créé une institution capable de lever des fonds sur les marchés financiers. Sa dotation devrait atteindre 700 milliards d'euros d'ici 2018, chaque pays membre contribuant au prorata de son PIB. Cet outil, accouché dans la douleur après deux ans de tractations, n'échappe pas aux critiques adressées aux euro-bonds : une crise prolongée pourrait conduire les marchés à attaquer la solidarité européenne en essayant de « faire sauter la banque », largement financée par l'Allemagne et la France.

Pourtant émettre des obligations au niveau européen permettrait de rendre la dette des pays en crise plus liquide et d'engager une vraie réflexion sur l'équilibre des budgets nationaux et le rôle de la Banque centrale européenne.

Les opposants, dont Jens Weidmann, Président de la Bundesbank s'est fait le porte-parole, redoutent la perte de souveraineté. Certes, mutualiser la dette des Etats membres conduirait à une responsabilité budgétaire partagée entre les Etats, et donc à un droit de regard de l'ensemble de l'Union lors de l'établissement du budget national. Mais, la souveraineté nationale n'a-t-elle pas déjà été entamée – comme en témoigne la situation du Portugal et de la Grèce soumis à des restructurations pour obtenir un financement ?

Derrière cet argument se cache, en fait, la considération de l'intérêt particulier des Etats.

Pourquoi augmenter le prix de son financement en aidant des pays périphériques ? Pourquoi impliquer d'autres Etats dans les décisions d'un Etat souverain ? Par civisme et conviction européenne ! Car comme nous enseigne Thucydide dans son récit de La Guerre du Péloponnèse… au Ve siècle avant J.C. : « une [union] sert mieux les intérêts de ses membres en étant d'aplomb dans son ensemble, que prospère en chacun de ses membres individuellement, mais chancelant collectivement. Un [pays] peut voir sa situation prendre un cours favorable : si

son [alliance] va à la ruine, il n'en est pas moins entraîné dans sa perte ; tandis que malheureux dans une [alliance] heureuse, il se tire beaucoup mieux d'affaires ».

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[1] Ce texte a été rédigé sous la direction d'Anne-Laure Delatte dans le cadre du cours « Macroéconomie mondiale » de la majeure Alter Management d' HEC.

[2] Expression empruntée à « Eurobonds, project bonds, … qu'est-ce que c'est ? », 23 Mai 2012, *Lemonde.fr*

L'emprunt forcé : l'arme de destruction massive de la politique budgétaire

par Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Gabriele Galateri di Genola et Philippe Weil

Il est grand temps, pour rappeler les marchés à la réalité, de ressortir l'emprunt forcé de l'arsenal budgétaire/ Time is ripe for governments to take out of their fiscal armoury the weapon that has served them so well in war and peace alike: forced borrowing

Financial Times – 15 September 2011

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b6850d0c-dec1-11e0-a228-00144feabdc0.html

Forced borrowing: the WMD of fiscal policy

By Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Gabriele Galateri di Genola and Philippe Weil

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of sovereign default. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Brussels and Frankfurt, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, French socialists and German Christian Democrats. Churchillian doctors, they prescribe blood, sweat and tears – fiscal consolidation, tax increases and spending cuts. They swear, for the umpteenth time, that they will never surrender: Greece will be saved, Italy and Spain will not be abandoned and the rating of France will not be downgraded. In the face of adversity, they assure us that what cannot be achieved by austerity can be achieved by more austerity. An epidemic of holier-than-thou fiscal virtue is spreading throughout Europe and is fast transforming a series of uncoordinated fiscal retrenchments into a euro-wide contraction with dire implications for growth and employment.

To be sure, eurozone policymakers are in a maddening situation. The threat to monetise public debt, which in the old days could be waved by each country to remind investors it need not ever default outright, has been removed from national arsenals. No one knows for sure whether it will ever be brandished from Frankfurt or if European treaties even allow it. Eurobonds would have every economic merit but they hurt Germany which, having been left on its own to finance reunification, is understandably cold towards *die Transfer-Union*. Creating separate northern and southern euro areas would probably precipitate the end of the single market – and where would France fit? Wide-ranging fiscal reform designed to increase tax revenue equitably, while sorely needed, is a pipe dream: it requires elusive European co-ordination in an area in which the temptation to compete is strong and it is best done at its own pace – not under the pressure of fickle market sentiment or rising sovereign spreads.

Add to this powerlessness the terrifying failure of the old engine of European policymaking (putting the cart before the horse in the hope that the cart will conjure up the horse) and you will understand the ghoulish visions gripping our leaders. Monetary union has not begotten the expected fiscal union. Imposing, as a substitute, austerity plans from Brussels or Frankfurt, or racing to be first to impose "golden rule" constitutional strictures on parliaments that should remain sovereign in fiscal matters is stoking the fire of civil unrest. The English Civil War and American Revolution were ignited by much less. It would be wise to recall, as John Hampden did in contesting the Ship Money tax levied by Charles I, that what leaders have no right to demand, a citizen has a right to refuse.

Yet Europe's fate is not sealed. The spectre of sovereign default and rising spreads in Italy, Spain, Belgium and other countries can be chased away in one fell swoop and the panic of contractionary fiscal policies can be stopped. National

governments must simply take out of their fiscal armoury the weapon that has served them so well in war and peace alike: forced borrowing.

It consists in coercing taxpayers to lend to their government. California did this in 2009 when it added a premium to the income tax withheld from paychecks, to be repaid the following year. In France, the first Mitterand government forced rich taxpayers to fund a two-year bond issue – and both the US and UK have used moral suasion in patriotic sales of war bonds. Compulsory lending is an unconventional weapon but it is high time it be used, even on a small scale, to remind investors that sovereigns are not private borrowers: they need never default because they can always force-feed debt issues to their own residents.

Central banks have been bold and dared resort to unconventional policies to respond to the exceptional circumstances of this crisis. Large sovereign borrowers should be as defiant and intrepid. The invaluable asset of fiscal sovereignty guarantees that their public debt is completely risk-free in nominal terms. Investors who buy sovereign credit default swaps against the spectre of French or Italian default are wasting their money. Policymakers rushing to austerity should wake up from their nightmare and save growth and employment before it is too late.

Jean-Paul Fitoussi is former president and Philippe Weil is president of OFCE, the Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques in Paris. Gabriele Galateri di Genola is president of Generali. The views expressed are their own.

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